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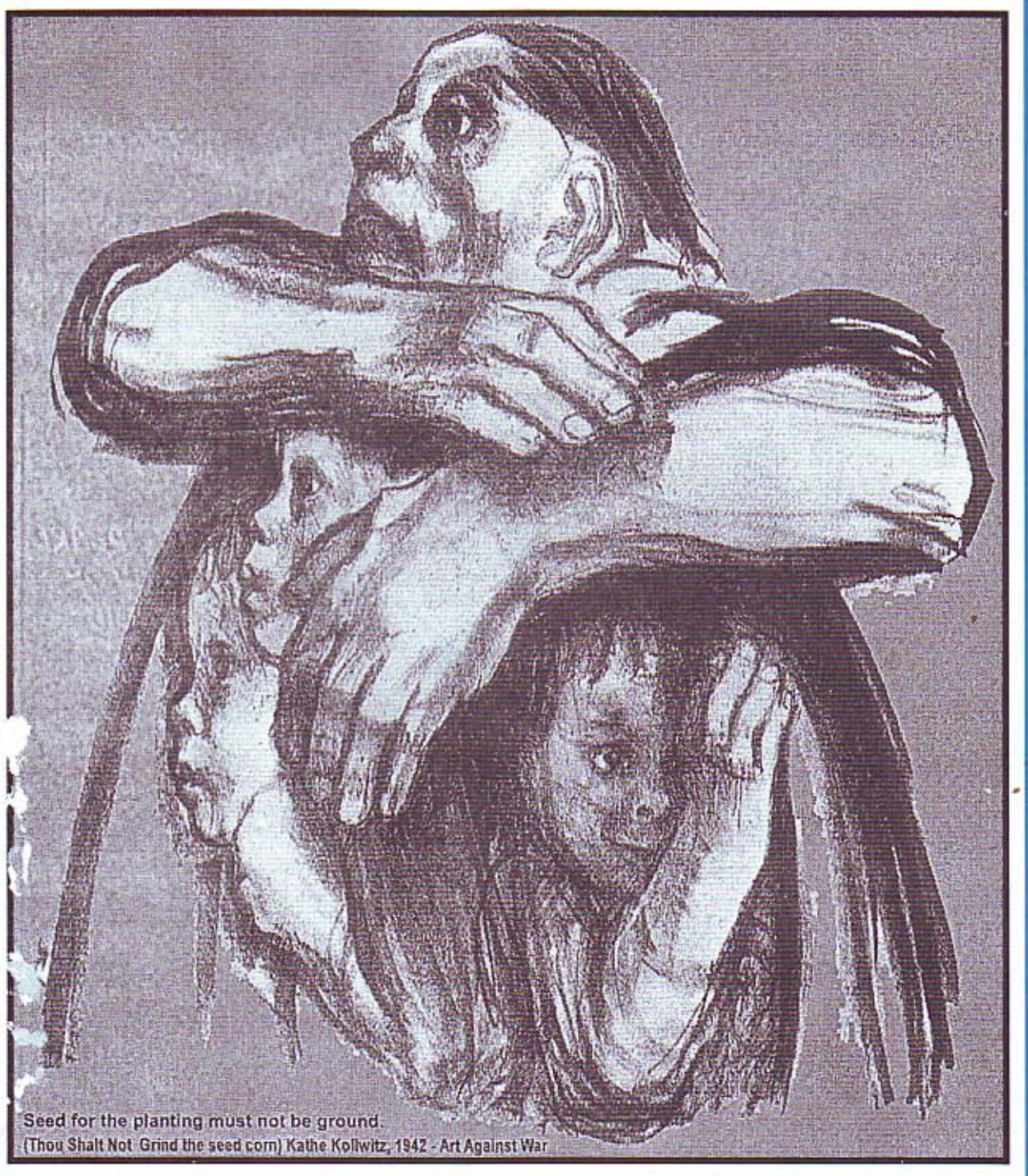

Seed for the planting must not be ground.
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-Voltaire

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Whither PA-UNP Talks?

The governmental crisis facing Sri Lanka continues without any sign of resolution. The Parliament that was prorogued by the President is expected to be in session by 7 September. And if the current impasse continues, the governing Peoples Alliance (PA) having lost its majority in Parliament will certainly face defeat on a no-confidence motion sponsored mainly by the United National Party and supported by other opposition parties.

For a time, it seemed possible that the government would survive with the support of the JVP, which has 10 seats in Parliament. However, that support was offered subject to several conditions and limited to a "probationary" period of one year. Had the government accepted the JVP's offer, many felt that it would have held the government to ransom at every tern. In fact, there was considerable opposition both within the governing party and many sections of the political establishment, to the government striking a deal with the JVP. President Kumaratunga has now formally informed the JVP that its conditions are unacceptable.

In the meantime both the governing party and the UNP have come under considerable pressure from various quarters, including some foreign diplomatic circles, to reach an arrangement to form what is described as a government of national reconciliation. The US Embassy officially confirmed its efforts in this regard because the United States, along with many other friends of Sri Lanka, has been concerned about the island's political uncertainty and its possible impact on the prospects for peace and economic growth in the country.

It would seem that serious talks between the PA and the UNP are now probable following an invitation to the UNP leader from Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake suggesting that the "two main political parties should open political talks to form a national reconciliation government in a bid to salvage the country from the present crisis," Both parties have appointed teams of negotiators to conduct the talks.

Whether the talks between these parties would succeed or not will depend on the extent to which they are prepared to compromise on their earlier stated positions. Previous attempts during the past two months failed because of what the President and the governing party consider as "excessive demands" from the UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. It is said that his demands included that he be appointed Prime Minister with executive powers presently vested in the President and that important cabinet portfolios like Finance should be allocated to UNP nominees. In demanding to become Prime Minister with executive powers, he wants introduced in practice the 'Gaullist' system under which executive powers are shared between the President and Prime Minister as operated in France.

Many believe that the UNP leader's demand to become "Executive Prime Minister" is constitutionally untenable. The Constitution specifically states that "the executive power of the People, including the defence of Sri Lanka, shall be exercised by the President of the Republic elected by the People". The elected President will be abdicating her constitutional function of exercising 'executive power of the People" if she, as a price for securing UNP support in Parliament, were to transfer in practice that function to any other person not so elected by the People.

Even in terms of democratic principles, the demand of the UNP leader seems unjustifiable. He was defeated at the last presidential election at which Mrs Kumaratunga was elected President by the people for a term of six years. The Peoples Alliance secured the most number seats at the general election held in October last year and still remains the largest party in parliament. On the other hand, while the government may have lost its majority, the UNP also does not command a majority in parliament, and there is no guarantee that all the other opposition parties would support a UNP-led alternative government. In this background, the price demanded by the UNP leader that he is appointed executive Prime Minister and that more important cabinet portfolios be allocated to the UNP can be described as gravely offending the basic principles of democracy.

If the proposed talks between the PA and the UNP are to succeed leading to the formation a government of national reconciliation, then the UNP leader should moderate and scale down his extravagant expectations. Ganging up with an assortment of opposition political parties holding mutually contradictory and even irreconcilable policies for the purpose of bringing down the government may be an easy option to aim for and achieve in the present parliamentary context. However, that would not result in the formation a government capable of tackling the crisis facing the governance of the country, and more importantly addressing the absolutely essential need for the resuscitation of the peace process by recommencing negotiations with the LTTE.

Any proposed arrangement for the setting up of a government of national reconciliation should not be limited to a political partnership between the PA and the UNP. It should also include those like-minded parties, groups and individuals who are committed to the resolution of the ethnic conflict, restoration of peace and undertaking constitutional reform that guarantees the fundamental and democratic rights of all the people inhabiting the island.

NEWS TRACK

Fractured Paradise: Aug 2 - British photojournalist Paul Harris launched his book "Fractured Paradise" at the Galle Face hotel on 2 August evening. He presented the first copy of his book to Bradman Weerakoon former advisor on International Relations to two Sri Lankan Presidents. In his latest book Harris, who is the author of over 30 books on areas of conflict notably the book, "Cry Bosnia", weeps for Lanka, truly describing the island as a fractured paradise now. His pictures are bloody but newsy and tell the world the agony of Lanka. Many of the pictures in his photo book are far removed from those found in the conventional photo books, ranging from the bloody attacks by suicide bombers and war-damaged Jaffna to images from the Eastern province and even election campaigns.

Paul Harris is a specialist contributor on insurgency and terrorism for Jane's Intelligence Review. He has made eighteen visits to Sri Lanka before the publication of this book. Speaking at his book launch Harris said that Sri Lanka is facing its sternest test now and is set to face the ultimate test whether it will survive as a sovereign state.

Restrictions on journalists reimposed: Aug 3 - The Sri Lankan government has reimposed restrictions on journalists covering the war in the northern areas held by the Tamil Tigers. The move comes just three months after withdrawing the tough regulations. Jour- nalists travelling to the war front will now be required to get written permission.

End of the road for Weekend Express: Aug 3 – "Weekend Express" newspaper, the English publication of Express Newspapers and the publishers of the Tamil daily Virakesari, ceased publication from 5 August after its final edition. Management of the newspaper has said that they have made the decision to close down the paper due cost of production, economic conditions and rising cost of raw material. However a senior journalist attached to the newspaper said that no prior notice was given to them and the management of the newspaper has shown the road to them. He questioned, "The owners say that they will give us six months salary as compensation. But, what can we do with just six months salary?" Weekend Express, a popular Saturday newspaper first came to the news stands in December 1995

Airport defense to be overhauled: Aug 3 - Sri Lanka authorities said that they had set up a high-level committee to oversee new security measures at its international air- port and an adjoining airbase following last month's devastating guerrilla attack. The committee will include top-ranking officials from the armed forces and the ministries of defense, aviation and tourism. A government statement said a new security plan was discussed for the Bandaranaike International Airport and measures would include stronger perimeter defense, the use of elec- tronic devices and double fencing.

Colombo port dealt crippling blow: Aug 3 - Colombo's main international port suffered a double blow when hefty surcharges were imposed on ships calling at the port following last month's attack at the airport as trade union action crippled work at the port for the second consecutive day. Workers of a main container terminal are protesting against a new work schedule, which is meant to improve efficiency. Sri Lanka Ports Authority Chairman, Mohan Samarasekara, said authorities have decided to seek the support of experienced workers who have returned from Middle East and retired workers to carry on opera- tions at the Colombo Port. "We will be announcing tonight that experienced workers will be recruited in walk-in interviews," he said.

PA in fix over CWC demands: Aug 3 - The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), a major constituent party of the People's Alliance, said it was awaiting the President's response to its two demands that "that Sri Lankan citizenship be granted to four hundred thousand Tamils in the island's plantation sector and that sixteen electorates should be carved out for them". The party's leader Mr. Arumugam Thondaman said that the CWC would not support the referendum if the PA does not meet its demands.

GMOA wants 100 per cent salary increase: Aug. 4 - The Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) yesterday called on the government to grant a 100 per cent salary increase to all public servants to help meet the rising cost of living.A GMOA spokesman said that the present salary of a graded doctor inclusive of all allowances is Rs. 17,000. This is equivalent to 372 dollars in 1994 and at present equivalant to 172 dollars. This denotes that the real value of the salary has decreased by 50%.

World Teachers urge peace talks: The World Teachers' Conference held under the auspices of the Education International (EI) at Jimstil City in Thailand, unanimously adopted a resolution requesting the Sri Lankan President to "expedite the Norwegian brokered peace process to find a lasting political solution to the ethnic problem." Over 2000 delegates from 150 countries representing 310 teachers' trade unions in the world attended the conference, according to Mr.T.Mahasivam, General Secretary of the Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union (CTTU) who returned home from Thailand.

PA to expel SLMC rebel MPs: Aug 5 - The ruling People's Alliance has initiated disciplinary inquiry against three Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) parliamentarians for joining the opposition in parliament. The Secretary General of the People's Alliance Mr.D.M. Jayaratne has issued show cause notices on Mr.A.L.A.Athuallah, Mr.M.S.M. Thouweek and Mr.Risvie Sinnalebbe "why they should not be expelled from parliament for the defection from government group."

Referendum Postponed: Aug 7 - Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunge in a proclamation issued on 7 Aaugust postponed for October 18 the referendum which has been scheduled to be held on August 21.

"Giving serious considerations to the recommendations and views ex-

pressed by Venerable Mahanayake Theras, members of Maha Sangha, religious dignitaries, religious organisations, political parties, civil groups, trade unions the referendum scheduled to be held on August 21 is postponed to October 18," said the proclamation issued by President Chandrika Kumaratunge.

"I am pleased to observe that consensus has been emerging among the peace loving people of Sri Lanka that there should be constitutional reforms which would enable the establishment more democratic forms of governance and more representative parliament to facilitate the smooth implementation of the executive and legislature of the state", President Kumaratunge said in her statement in this regard.

President further said:

"It is significant that since the proclamation of the referendum political parties supporting the Peoples Alliance and the opposition have agreed to support the government to introduce the most urgent amendments to the constitution to achieve the wishes of the President even without the referendum.

"However if the political parties failed to reach an agreement under the provision amending the constitution, the President will not hesitate to proceed consult the people directly through the referendum scheduled to be held on October 18."

The proclamation to hold referendum on August 21 was issued by President Kumaratunge on 10th of July.

Anura denies rumours: Aug 9 - The Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament, Anura Bandaranaike said that a false and malicious rumour has been deliberately spread through certain mass media that he is to resign from the office of Speaker of Parliament. "This is totally untrue and baseless. The public is aware of the fact that I was elected unanimously as Speaker, jointly by the Government and the Opposition, after the General Election of year 2000. There is absolutely no reason for me to resign from the office of Speaker," he said.

5 airports identified ultra-hyper sensitive : Aug 9 -The Indian ministry of civil aviation has identified the Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Jammu and Srinagar air-ports as Coimbatore and Tiruvanathapuram as sensitive airports in the wake of last month's Colombo airport blasts carried out by the LTTE that damaged nearly 14 aircraft. A circular to this effect was sent to authorities of airports identified as having threat perception four days ago.The Union Cabinet at its recent meeting decided to beef up the security while the ministries of Civil Aviation and Home Affairs and the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has issued separate circulars to all airports in view of the threat perceptions.

11 officers suspended after airport attack: Aug 9 - Sri Lankan authorities have suspended 11 air-force officers responsible for guarding the country's only international airport and the military base for supersonic aircraft after LTTE attacks on both, officials said. The men had earlier been transferred out of their posts and the suspension orders were issued Wednesday as two investigations got underway, a defence ministry spokesman said

TULF urges President to start talks with LTTE: Aug 9 - The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) on 9 August urged Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunge to pursue the Norwegian peace initiative and commence negotiations with the Liberation Tigers before framing a new constitution. A press statement issued by the TULF, after meeting the President on Wednesday, said that the party had urged the President to "reconvene Parliament and also not to proceed with the referendum."

A press release issued by the TULF said "A delegation of the TULF comprising Mr.R.Sampanthan, Secretary General, Senior Vice President and Parliamentarian Mr.V.Anandasangaree, Parliamentarians Mr.Joseph Pararajasingham, Mr.Mavai Senathirajah, Mr.P.Selvarasa and Mr.S.Sivamaharasa and Jaffna Mayor Mr.N.Raviraj met President Chandrika at the invitation of the latter at the President's House.

"President Chandrika explained to the TULF delegation the events and circumstances, which led to the calling of the referendum on a proposed new constitution, originally fixed for August 21. The TULF delegation then explained to the President the decisions made unanimously at its central working committee meeting held on August 5 and handed over to her a copy of the resolution.

"The TULF delegation emphasized the importance and need to pursue the Norwegian initiative and commence negotiations with the LTTE prior to the framing of a new constitution.

"The TULF urged that since some progress had already been made through the efforts of Norway towards the commencement of negotiations between the Government and the LTTE, the outstanding issues should be resolved through further negotiations, and that the issues which remained unresolved were not insurmountable.

"The TULF also emphasized the imperative need to bring the war to an end through an acceptable negotiated political settlement so that the Tamil people would be relieved from the immense suffering to which they are subjected by the continuance of the war."The President explained that the Government remains committed to the peace process, and the continuance of the Norwegian initiative.

"The TULF delegation also urged the President to reconvene Parliament and also not to proceed with the Referendum as presently contemplated."

Over 100 arrested in combined search: Aug 9 - More than one hundred Tamil persons were arrested during a major cordon and search operation in Kochchikade near Negombo, about 50 km. north of Colombo 9 August morning. More than one thousand Army and Police personnel were deployed during the operation, police said. Police in Negombo said 140 Tamils who were arrested during the operation are being questioned at the local police station. Fifty-seven of them are residents of the northern and eastern provinces, and the rest from the hill-country areas, the police said.

"All are being interrogated by special investigators as they are unable to provide necessary documents for the stay in Negombo," a spokesman for the Negombo police said. Human rights sources said that about one hundred Tamils arrested following the attack on Katunayake airbase and airport last month in the adjoining areas are still being detained at the Negombo police station and other detention centres elsewhere.

JVP's Proposals to President: Aug 10 - President Chandrika Kumaratunge agreed to discuss the Marxist Janata Vimukthi Peramuna's political proposals with the leaders of constituent parties in the ruling People's Alliance. Following discussions JVP leaders had with President Chandrika about the political crisis in the country for about two hours, the JVP's parliamentary group leader Wimal Weerawanse said, "the President has agreed to a number of proposals in our program. She wanted more time to discuss with her political allies about the proposal to form a probation government."

Mr.Weerawanse said, "the President informed us that she needed more time to study our proposals that included general election under a caretaker government and the establishment of independent commissions for police, judiciary, media and public service, with the constituent political parties in the ruling People's Alliance."

According to Mr. Weerawanse, the President assured the JVP delegation that a decision on the formation of a probation government would be made available to them shortly in writing. The JVP delegation informed the President that postponed referendum should be cancelled and the prorogued parliament resummoned to create a conducive situation to implement their set of proposals.

France Denies Visa Claim: Aug 10 - The French Foreign Ministry denied claims by the Sri Lankan information department and state media that it had denied entry to the Liberation Tigers, chief negotiator Anton Balasingham and other individuals alleged by Sri Lanka to be linked to the LTTE. A spokesman for the French government, quoted the Foreign Minister Hubert Verdrine, said "We have not banned any particular persons or members of any particular organisations from entering France."

Speaking to the Tamil Television Network (TTN), the French spokesman denied the claims which appeared in Sri Lankan state media about a bar on entry for the London-based LTTE chief negotiator Anton Balasingham and others. He said that visas are issued according to immigration regulations prevailing at the time, and there was no mechanism to place a blanket denial as claimed in news reports from Colombo. .

The Daily News in a report on 10 August quoting government media sources said, "France has decided to close the door for six hardcore LTTE members, including its theoretician Anton Balasingham."

The claim had first been made in the website of the Sri Lankan government's Information Department. The Special Media Information Centre (SMIC), the Government's official arm for the dissemination of information declared in a news release on August 8 under the headline "The French authorities prohibit the hard core LTTE cadres from entering France", and named the following as the persons prohibited: Anton Stanislaus BALASINGHAM alias Anton; Arunachalam Chrisanthakumar alias Shanthan; Lucien Rupert Soosaipillai alias Thanam; Vallipuram Ramachandran alias Ramsar; Sothilingam Santhakumar alias Chinna Shanthan; and Kathiravelpillai Kuhachandran.

Deputy Ministers submit resignation letters: Aug 16 - Thirty eight Deputy Ministers volunteered to resign their posts and Parliamentary seats, in a display of solidarity with President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. The Deputy Ministers handed over undated resignation letters to President Kumaratunga at the President's House on 16 August.

The Deputy Ministers in their letters stated that they would stand by whatever decision of the President in the present crisis situation. They expressed hope that this move would strengthen the hands of the President and foil attempts by the UNP to subvert the Government.

It has been widely reported that the UNP had been attempting to get government party MPs to defect to the opposition. "MPs were offered millions of rupees to cross over. The UNP made its best attempt to buy the MPs to topple the democratically elected Government using wheeler dealers' money. Now we have blocked their all ulterior motives through this measure," Deputy Minister Ekanayake said. "No body asked or influenced us to take this step to hand over undated resignation letters to the President. We purely did it in order to strengthen the hands of the President," he added.

Check-point rape suspect remanded: Aug 16 - Police Constable Kamal Priyantha Prematilleke, the first suspect in the Maradana check-point rape case was on 16 August further remanded till August 29.

The second and third, Constable Jayasiri Kumar and Soldier SP Senanayake were released on bail by the Maligakanda Magistrate and Additional District Judge Ms. Sarojani Kusala Weerawardena. They were ordered to furnish cash bail of Rs. 7,500 and a bond of Rs. 100,000 with two sureties each.

The other three suspects, Police constable Priyantha Sujeewalal Nanayakkara, two soldiers Wasantha Kumar and G. A. R. Upula were not identified at the parade. Earlier they were released on bail in Rs. 5,000 and a bond of Rs. 100,000 each. They were directed to appear in court on September 12.

Earlier the victim identified Police Constable, Kamal Prematilleke, as one of the persons who raped her at the identification parade held before Acting Maligakanda Magistrate Mr. Lloyd Grey.

The Judge directed the Police to consult the Attorney General and file a further report on September 12. Colombo DIG Gerard Ignatius is directing investigations conducted by Colombo Central SP D. A. de Fonseka. Chief Inspector R. A. Edirisinghe, OIC, Maradana Police with Inspector Priyanka Wijenayake, OIC, CDB, SI Nimal Perera and Sergeant Senevirantne are assisting in the investigations.

Shun vituperative politics: Aug 17 - The Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS) has urged all politicians of the Government and the opposition parties to abandon vituperative politics and join hands to ensure the restoration of parliamentary democracy, peace and law and order in the country.

The association in a statement issued on 17 August said it had watched with great concern, dismay and regret the efforts made by politicians to exploit every turn of events to their own political advantage. Politicians should abandon vituperative politics which will lead the country nowhere.

The statement signed by Association President, Prof. J. N. Fernando also said: "We, the scientists of Sri Lanka

view with grave concern, sorrow and consternation the serious political, social and economic crisis facing Sri Lanka today. We have witnessed over the past many decades, increasing crime and violence, deterioration of moral standards and increasing political instability. Peace and unity have taken a severe beating everywhere in the country.

"The unstable environment has contributed to making the public including the scientific community feel very insecure and doubtful about the future, resulting in an increasing drain of scientists and professionals from the country. Those remaining are also finding it increasingly difficult to carry out their work and contribute to much needed national development as well as advancement of science."

Air Force Mig crashes: Aug 18 - A Russian-built MIG 27 Air Force fighter jet crashed killing its Ukranian pilot in Seeduwa, while it was on a routine training mission on 18 August. The crash took place at 11.15 am and the ill-fated aircraft was piloted by an Ukrainian, Military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne said.

According to reports from the crash site, the aircraft had hit a house and the pilot was killed instantly. A few bystanders were also injured when the plane had crashed on to the ground. Five persons who were injured were rushed to the Negombo Hospital.

A special Air Force team along with the Negombo police are investigating into the incident.

President and Minister exchange accusations: Aug 21- A senior minister and General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Mr.S.B.Dissanayake, is likely to make a decision shortly whether to continue in the government or to leave, following a letter sent to him by President Chandrika Kumaratunge, ruling party sources said. The President stated in her letter that she has lost confidence in Mr.Dissanayake as he had violated financial regulations and government's directives in running the ministry of Samurdhi (Poverty Alleviation).

President Kumaratunge in her letter blamed Minister S.B.Dissanayake for "the failure to carry out instructions of the government and contravening financial regulations by depositing 160 millions rupees of the Samurdhi Department in a private bank."

President Chandrika's reply was in response to a four-page statement by Minister Dissanayake issued on 20 August accusing her "for several blunders she had made in her seven-year rule", political sources said.

In his statement Minister Dissanayake wanted "the President to admit her 'failures' openly in a bid to overcome the present political crisis." He said, "we must accept the mistakes we have made".

Tigers overrun Police camp: Aug 21 - At least twenty military trained policemen were killed and 20 wounded when the Liberation Tigers attacked and destroyed the main Police station at Central Camp, on August 21 night, police sources in Ampara said. Seven others were reported missing in the attack, the sources said. Central Camp is a Sinhala settlement, about 35 kilometers south west of Batticaloa near the district's border with Ampara.

About one hundred policemen and home guards were manning the Police station when it came under attack around 11 p.m. Many deserted their posts during the first phase of the attack, the sources said. Twenty bodies of the policemen and home guards have been recovered, they said.

The Tigers reportedly remained at the police station till around 4.30 a.m. and withdrew after clearing the camp of all weaponry. They said the attackers came in tractors.

Eighteen wounded policemen have been admitted to the Ampara hospital. Details of LTTE casualties were not known. Two civilians were also reported killed during the heavy fighting, police sources said.

According to residents who came to Batticaloa town in the afternoon from the western hinterland of the district, four bodies of the police personnel who were killed in the attack had been brought by the Tigers to Pattipallai. They said that the Tigers also had diplayed part of weapons captured from the overrun detachment. Quoting LTTE sources in Pattipallai, they said that two Tigers were killed and six others wounded in the attack.

Court stays PA's expulsion of SLMC MPs: Aug 22 - The Colombo District Judge issued an enjoining order restraining the ruling People's Alliance (PA) General Secretary and his disciplinary committee from taking steps to expel three Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) MPs from parliament.

The District Judge Mr.Sunil Rajapakse issued the order when the case filed by three parliamentarians Mr.M.S. M.Thowfeek (Trincomalee), Mr.A.T. Athaullah (Ampara) and Mr.Risvie Sinnalebbe (National List) was taken up for inquiry Wednesday. They said in their petition "they are members of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. Hence the People's Alliance has no right to expel them from parliament as the SLMC is a constituent party of the ruling People's Alliance"

The Disciplinary Committee appointed by the General Secretary of the ruling PA is scheduled to meet Thursday to take a decision on the future of these three parliamentarians as the two weeks notice given to these MPs by the PA General Secretary to show cause why they should not be expelled from parliament for crossing over to opposition expires then.

The PAs position is that "these three parliamentarians contested and won the October 2000 general election under the symbol of People's Alliance. Therefore they are still members of Peoples' Alliance."

However the SLMC (Hakeem wing) argues that "though they contested in the PA ticket, they are members of the SLMC, which has signed a memorandum of understanding with the PA to contest the last general election. According to the MOU, Peoples' Alliance has no legal right to expel SLMC parliamentarians who contested under the symbol of PA."

The stay order by the District Court has now restrained the Disciplinary Committee of the PA from taking any decision in regard to these MPs until their case is determined. Further hearing has been fixed for September 5

Last week the Court of Appeal extended its stay order on the Commissioner of Elections and the Secretary General of Parliament from accepting any letters from Ms Ferial Ashraff as President of National Unity Alliance in regard to the expulsion of these three

parliamentarians from parliament. In this case further inquiry was fixed for September 25.

Detained student to be medically examined: Aug 22 - Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ordered that Jaffna University student Krishnasamy Thiviyan should be subjected to medical examination by the Colombo Judicial Medical Officer (JMO). A three member bench presided by Chief Justice Sarath N.Silva and comprising Justice Shiranee A.Bandaranaike and Justice P.Edussuriya issued the order when a fundamental rights application filed on behalf of Thiviyan was taken up for inquiry. Sri Lanka's Attorney General and the General Officer Commanding of the Sri Lanka Army, Jaffna district have been cited as the respondents in the application.

Counsel A.Vinayagamoorthy for the petitioner submitted to court that Thiviyan was subjected to severe torture after the arrest by SLA soldiers. He made an application that Colombo JMO should submit a report to court after the examination. The Supreme Court made the order accordingly and instructed the respondents to submit the medical report on the next date. Further hearing was fixed for October 30.

The Sri Lankan security forces arrested Thiviyan on 2 July this year at Kondavil north of Jaffna town. He is now being detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) on the orders of Jaffna Magistrate.

Following mass agitation by Tamil students in the Tamil dominated northeast region, demanding the release of Thiviyan, the SLA transferred him from their custody to the police. Thereafter Police produced Thiviyan before Jaffna Magistrate. The students had told the court that he was tortured by troops whilst in detention.

UNP ready for talks with PA: Aug 23 - The leader of Sri Lanka's main opposition party said Thursday that his United National Party (UNP) was prepared to hold discussions with the ruling People's Alliance government to find a solution to the country's political and economic crises. "However, these discussions should be based on the acceptance of the democratic policies and the concepts of parliamentary majority," Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe stressed in a letter to Sri Lanka's Prime Minster, Ratnasiri Wickremanayake. The UNP leader has said that proposed talks could commence on 24 August.

Mr.Wickremasinghes reply was in response to an invitation by the Prime Minister Wickremanayake suggesting that the "two main political parties should open political talks to form a national reconciliation government in a bid to salvage the country from the present crisis".

The UNP has named a group of representatives to have discussions with the People's Alliance, the party said. The members of the UNP team are – Mr Karu Jayasuriya, Deputy Leader, Party Chairman Mr Charitha Ratwatte, and Parliamentarians Mr Tyrone Fernando and Mr K.N.Choksy.

Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe said in his reply that the proposed talks should be completed within an agreed time frame. "Reconvening parliament, canceling the referendum, establishment of five independent commissions for Police, Judiciary, Elections, Public Service and Media should be given priority in the proposed talks."

Tigers attack SLA at Kokkuthoduvaai: Aug 23 - Thirteen Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers were killed and 24 wounded when the Liberation Tigers attacked forward defence lines of the Kokkuthoduvaai camp south of Mullaithivu, in the north-eastern coast, around 3 a.m 0n 23 August. Ten SLA soldiers have been reported 'missing' in the attack, army sources said. Six LTTE members were killed in the fighting, the sources added.

The Tigers simultaneously shelled Janaka Pura Army camp in the near by Manal Aaru (Weli Oya) region, the sources said. The Tigers used tanks and mortars in the predawn attacks on the SLA camps at Janakapura and Kokkuthoduwaai, military spokesman Brigadier Sarath Karunaratne said. He admitted two SLA bunkers at Kokkuthoduwaai were in the control of LTTE for about one hour.

Meanwhile the Tigers attacked the jetties at Gurunagar and Colombagam in Jaffna town, around 3 a.m. on 23 August Police in the northern town said. A large number of LTTE members participated in the attack, said Jaffna's Senior Superintendent of Police W.Kudahetty. The police recovered the bodies of two LTTE members killed in this fighting, he said.

Further details of the fighting were not known. The Tigers have not yet commented on the fighting.

No cargo backlog at airport: Aug 23 - Sri Lankan Airlines have denied that there is a backlog of cargo at the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) as a result of disruptions caused by the LTTE's attack on the airport on July 24.

"Although our capacity has decreased with six aircraft less, there is no backlog or insufficient capacity in our airline even now, because we were operating under-capacity even prior to the July 24 attack, due to world-wide slump in the air cargo industry," said Mr.Naveen Gunawardene, Senior Manager Cargo in a press release. "If you consider BIA's available average tonnage per day of approximately 500 tonnes, there is no lack of capacity. Some airlines have changed the type of aircraft they are operating and therefore the per aircraft capacity on some flights may be less.

Saying that overall, there is no capacity shortage in BIA, Mr.Gunawardene stressed, "With the reentry of our seventh aircraft, a long haul Airbus A340, into the fleet from September 1, our capacity will in fact increase." Sri Lankan Airlines have also denied the other rumour that it had asked other airlines to add a passenger insurance surcharge of USD 80 on every return ticket. The decision to add the surcharge was a commercial decision taken by individual airlines, the airlines said. ❐

News in Focus

● Chilling Fear of Rape Haunts Tamil Women in Sri Lanka

Aug. 23 - Exhausted after a night's work at a busy cafe and an anxious encounter with police, Velu Arshadevi was fast asleep when the loud thumping came at the door of a house shared by the cafe's employees.

"I sat up in the bed. It was about 3 in the morning and who would come?" Arshadevi recalled asking herself.

At the door, the 28-year-old mother of two found the police officer who had stopped her on the street hours earlier. He said she would have to come with him to the station as police needed to further verify her identity because she was a Tamil.

The identity check earlier was routine, and - as always - unnerving. Police regularly question Tamils about possible ties to the militants who have waged a civil war for 18 years to establish a separate homeland for Sri Lanka's 3.2 million minority Tamils.

But what came next scarred Arshadevi's life, and her case has come to represent the worst fears of Tamil women - being raped by members of the Sinhalese-dominated security forces who exercise control over their day-to-day lives.

While the government denies the rebels' charges that Tamils are discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese - 14 million of the 18.6 million population - Tamils point to their treatment at police checkpoints as just one example of how their lives are different.

A Sinhalese who presents his national identity card usually is allowed to go on. A Tamil in most cases will be detained if they don't also have a separate police report verifying their name, age and address.

Standing outside her home after the knock on her door that night in June, Arshadevi was afraid to go with the policeman. She argued that her ID papers had already been checked and were in order.

But he insisted, and she had no choice. Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the police and military in this island nation have special powers to interrogate, arrest and indefinitely detain anyone they suspect of connections to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Arshadevi told The Associated Press in an interview that instead of being taken to the police station, she was pushed into a narrow concrete staircase leading to an army camp. For the next hour and a half, she said, she was gang raped as she cried out for her attackers to stop.

The policeman who led her to the stairway, S. Premathilake, now faces charges of rape along with two of his colleagues.

Arshadevi's ordeal has brought protests from Tamil parliament members and human rights organizations.

Selvy Thiruchandran of the Women's Education and Research Center, a government-funded rights group, said the rapes are another manifestation of a civil war born of an ancient conflict between two ethnic groups, each with its own language and religion. "'This rape is as much an ethnic issue, as it is a gender issue,'" she said.

The London-based Amnesty International said in a statement: "Any security officer found responsible for rape, sexual abuse or other torture, or for encouraging or condoning them, should be brought to justice."

Women's right advocates say many cases of rape or sexual harassment have been reported by Tamil women in the past, but there have been no convictions against security forces except one where the victim was murdered.

In March, two Tamil women detained by navy and police in the Tamil-majority northern town of Mannar reported they were gang-raped by members of the security force. No arrests have been made.

Kumudini Samuel of the Women & Media Collective, a women's rights group, said in many cases Tamil women don't report rape or abuse because they fear further harm from police and doubt action will be taken. "It is imperative that the state afford some kind of protective system for those who are detained by the security forces," she said.

She blamed much of the problem on the "intense militarization" in Colombo. Between 5,000 to 10,000 security personnel are on duty at any given time in the capital, on guard against Tamil rebels who have often set off bombs and on July 24 attacked the country's only international airport outside Colombo.

Because of Arshadevi's difficult life - and her courage - her case has drawn sympathy for the cause of Tamil women in the island. Her father died when she was a child, leaving her with an invalid mother and five siblings, who soon left home. The youngest in the family, she dreamed of being a nurse or a teacher. But she had to leave school at 14 to work. She was married at 18 and widowed at 25. To support her two young daughters, she traveled to Colombo to find a job.

Arshadevi recounted how her attackers had warned her not to tell anyone what happened. But she filled out a report to police, with help from her employer, only hours after the rape. "I reported it because I don't want anyone to go through what I did," she said. (Associated Press)

● LTTE Warns Jaffna Civilians

In a statement issued by the political wing of the LTTE and published in the Uthayan newspaper, the LTTE has warned civilians in Jaffna not to co-operate with the Sri Lankan Army or the Government administration.

The statement titled, "A long letter to the people of the Jaffna peninsula" said; "Dear people of the Jaffna peninsula, You are living at a time when the Jaffna peninsula is undergoing a serious crisis. You should lead very responsible lives at a time like this. On the one hand the peninsula is subjected to aggression by Sinhala chauvinists. On the other hand traitors are active to put out the great revolutionary fire that is being created by thousands of great heroes who are shedding their blood for the cause of Eelam."

The LTTE declared in the statement that the day will not be too far when the entire territory of Jaffna will be liberated from oppressive aggressors. On that day no traitor will be allowed to escape inevitable reprisal, the LTTE warned.

"Do not get trapped by the schemes of traitors. Co-operate with the freedom fighters to hasten the day of liberation," the statement said.

Government officials and Samurdhi animators were among the groups that

were specially warned. A media report said that already an LTTE pistol gang had shot dead a Samurdhi worker Sinnathambi.

Since late 1995 when the Sri Lankan Army wrested control of Jaffna from the Tamil Tigers who retreated into Vanni and Mullaitivu areas, the LTTE has tried to recapture Jaffna. Last year the LTTE succeeded in over-running the Elephant Pass military base and in a series of offensives attempted to capture the city of Jaffna. But the Security forces with enhanced firepower and modern weapons provided by the Government halted the LTTE offensive at the doorstep to Jaffna town. Subsequently, the Security Forces pushed back the LTTE, so that at present the Tigers are not in a position to make a direct attack on the city.

Following the recent attack on the Katunayake airforce base and the adjoining civilian airport by the LTTE, it is speculated that the Tamil Tigers are making preparations to launch a massive new offensive to recapture Jaffna, and it is in this context the latest warning to the people of Jaffna from the LTTE has to be understood, a military analyst said

● Checkpoint Rape Victim Files Court Case

The victim in the Maradana checkpoint rape incident on 24th June had filed a petition before the Supreme Court for a declaration that her fundamental rights had been violated and seeking relief for the trauma suffered.

Velu Arasadevi of Konagala Estate, Passara (presently housed at the Salvation Army Home) submitted that the physical violence and the mental trauma that she had been subjected to by 1st and 3rd Respondents were cruel inhuman and degrading which was in violation of Article 11 of the Constitution. She had injuries on the back of her body.

Petitioner states she had been devastated by the illegal arrest and torture. She had no means to support her two daughters and aged mother who looks after her children. She has been impoverished economically as a result of what she underwent. She had asked for leave to proceed with her petition and for court to direct the Registrar of the Supreme Court to call for the medical report pertaining to the medical examination of the petitioner by the Judicial Medical Officer, Colombo on the evening of June 24, 2001 when she was referred to that officer by the Headquarters Inspector of the Maradana Police.

Petitioner had also prayed for relief and costs as the court deems sit.

The respondents cited are A. P. Kamal Priyantha Prematilake RPC Fort Police H. A. Jayantha Sirikumara RPC Fort Police S. B. Senanayake, Private Sri Lanka Army, IGP Lucky Kodituwakku, Army Commander Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalle and the Attorney General.

● Opposition Parties Meet

Aug 17 - Members of Parliament belonging to the opposition parties unanimously passed six resolutions which they claimed would help to strengthen democracy and rescue the country from economic crisis. One hundred and thirteen members attended the meeting which was held in the Parliament buildings on 17 August.

Two members, the UNP's K.N. Choksy and JVP MP Vijitha Herath who were unable to be present had sent messages endorsing the decisions taken. Beisides the UNP, MPs belonging to the JVP, SLMC, TULF, TELO, ACTC and Sihala Urumaya attended the meeting.

The six resolutions were: Strengthen Parliament's powers, proceed with the No Confidence Motion against the Government, appoint a Select Committee to inquire into the conduct of the Chief Justice, cancel the referendum forthwith, condemn the killing of two participants in the July 19 anti-referendum demonstration and call upon law enforcement agencies not to carry out illegal orders for suppressing peaceful demonstrations. The last resolution was to meet the Speaker to discuss and decide Parliament sittings and allocation of time.

Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe said the Parliament reflected the people's view and it was the members duty to uphold the Constitution and democracy. "We all have different political agendas but we gathered here regardless of such differences to uphold democracy and the sovereignty of the Parliament," he added and insisted that Parliament should be reconvened immediately.

Parliament will exercise its right to determine its sessions when it meets on September 7 and sit from time to time as decided by Parliament, Mr Wickremesinghe said. Such sittings could not be suspended, prorogued or stopped in any manner whatsoever other than by Parliament, he added.

JVP Parliamentary Group leader Wimal Weerawansa said: "We in the JVP believe that the progressive and democratic forces of this country should get together to have a fresh and fair election which will represent the voice of the people. The JVP is ready to contribute to such an endeavour."

● US Behind PA-UNP Talks

The United States has acted as a mediator and a catalyst to bring together the Sri Lankan President Mrs.Chandrika Kumaratunga and the United National Party (UNP) Leader Mr.Ranil Wickremesinghe who seemed to have been locked in an unresolvable conflict, according to political circles in Colombo.

Prime Minister Mr.Ratnasiri Wickramanayake's formal letter to the UNP leader asking for official level talks between the ruling Peoples Alliance (PA) and the UNP for the formation of a Government of National Consensus and Mr.Wickremesinghe's conciliatory response, in which he had accepted the invitation and hinted at the dropping of contentious issues, could be attributed to the mediatory role played by the US Ambassador Mr.Ashley Wills.

Following a report in the local press that the US Ambassador had met President Kumaratunga and urged her to come to an understanding with the opposition United National Party (UNP) to bring peace, political stability and economic growth to Sri Lanka, the US Embassy here issued a statement 23 August saying that Mr.Wills had conveyed a message "from one party to another" on this question after consulting Washington.

The statement did not mention the names of the parties nor did it say which of the parties was the initiator of the process. But it did say, "Along with many other friends of Sri Lanka, the United States has been concerned about Sri Lanka's political uncertainty and its possible impact on the prospects for peace and economic growth in the country. That is why the ambassador agreed to carry the message."

● Jaffna Hospital A Casualty of War By Frances Harrison (BBC) in Jaffna

August 21 - Jaffna hospital has coped with two decades of fighting. Doctors in the northern Sri Lankan town of Jaffna

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say patients are dying because the defence ministry will not allow enough drugs into the area - the scene of two decades of conflict with Tamil rebels. Unlike any other government hospital in Sri Lanka, defence ministry approval is required for all shipments of drugs and medical equipment to Jaffna Hospital - but doctors say they only receive a fraction of what they need.

According to the hospital director, three babies recently died in the premature baby unit for want of a drug easily available elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Doctors say there have also been several occasions when newborn babies have died because of a shortage of oxygen. Dr Kumarawerl, the secretary of the Jaffna branch of the Government Medical Officers' Association, says the hospital lacks any working incubators.

Hot water bottles "We need six incubators because we have more than five babies to be kept in incubators. "We don't have that, so we just keep them in the open cots with hot water bags. "Sometimes we burn the babies, sometimes the babies are cold. "Every half an hour the nursing officers have to check whether it's too hot or cold or if it's necessary to change the hot water bottles." Jaffna Hospital used to be one of the best hospitals in the country before the war. Now it lacks everything - staff, medicine and equipment.

Administrators submit a list of the drugs they need to the government but say the defence ministry cuts their allocation drastically - sometimes only sending a tenth of what they ask for. The concern seems to be that the medical supplies might fall into rebel hands, but doctors say the drugs are never checked in Jaffna itself. Neglect Bureaucratic neglect means there have been times when the hospital has had no antibiotics or pain killers to offer patients undergoing surgery, according to another Jaffna staff member, Dr Thevakumar: "Most of the time we don't have analgesics because the government did not allow us to be sent this, especially the opiates.

"Usually we should give all the patients undergoing surgery analgesia but here we give only for major surgery. "Other patients we just give the anaesthetic agent only, so after the operation most of the patients are suffering from the pain." The doctors joke that in the West - or for that matter in Colombo - their patients could sue them for the pain they have to undergo after surgery. Staff here have a huge crowd of patients to deal with. Te hospital serves a population of half a million people.

War casualties The director, Dr Kanegaratnam, says the hospital itself was twice displaced by the fighting and has seen more than its share of war casualties: "I have seen bodies being brought wrapped in bags after shelling, and there are many landmine cases, victims who come in without legs and arms." It is only the dedication of the few remaining staff that keeps Jaffna hospital going. It has half the nurses it needs and only four specialists out of 32. This is a time of relative peace in Jaffna, but if fierce fighting breaks out again it is hard to imagine how the doctors would cope. They say the only good thing about periods of intense shelling is that the patients cannot reach the hospital at once.

- **Chemical Weapons Controversy**

Reports published recently in a Sun-

day newspaper in Colombo that the Sri Lankan military had acquired weapons with chemical warheads was soon been followed by a statement from the LTTE on 16 August alleging that the Sri Lankan Government purchased new infantry weapon system with chemical warheads in order to use them against the Liberation Tigers and the Thamil civilian population in the war-torn North and Eastern Sri Lanka.

But the Sri Lankan military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne flatly denied the accusation of the LTTE on next day, and he said that the claims of Liberation Tigers was totally untrue and bogus allegation. He added that the Liberation Tigers and their apparatus have been attempting to discredit the Sri Lankan military at the International level.

The LTTE said that: "This Russian made rocket propelled 'thermobaric' weapon is internationally banned for its lethal toxic effects on combatants and civilians. The acquisition of this banned weapon by Sri Lanka marks a new and dangerous escalation of the armed conflict in the island."

The government in a statement issued on 17 August said, "The government wishes to refute categorical reports that it has recently acquired weapons with chemical warheads. No such procurement has been made and there are no plans to obtain them. This false information has been jointly published by the tabloid - Sunday Leader as well as the official LTTE website. The government requests all media to desist from assisting the LTTE in its attempts to spread such lies. The government would take sternest action against any institution or person who may act irresponsibly in this manner."

However, a report published in the "EelamNation" web site on 20 August said that, "Several reports have confirmed today that Sri Lankan Government purchased the chemical weapons through a private company in Ukraine. ...Tamil political leaders confirmed the report and said that the Sri Lankan Government made the attempt several years ago. But one thousand pieces of the internationally banned weapon called R. P. O. Shmel Rocket Launcher have reached the hands of Sri Lankan Army recently with the help of British and Ukrainian Armed dealers.

"The politicians pointed out that a magazine highlighted the attempt by the Sri Lankan Government in 1997. But the Sri Lankan Government managed to keep the attempt of purchasing illegal weapons out of the knowledge of other countries including the United States of America. The United States said in a report that the weapons would cause extensive damage to that region even if the weapons were not exploded."

In the meantime, TULF MP Joseph Pararajasingham in a letter sent to President Kumaratunga has expressed shock and dismay by news report that the defense Ministry has acquired a deadly weapon to counter the on going conflict in the northeast, which will eventually affect the civilian population in these areas." He also has called upon the government "to abandon the use of this sort of deadly and lethal weaponry against the Tamil people in the northeast to suppress their legitimate aspirations and instead pursue the Norwegian peace initiative, create a conducive climate in the northeast by declaring a ceasefire, lift the ban on the LTTE and commence immediate negotiations with the LTTE to end this war."

Defence officials in Colombo are said to be deeply concerned over efforts by the LTTE to whip up adverse international opinion with claims that the Sri Lanka Army had purchased banned chemical weapons quoting what the Army says is "an incorrect and sensationalist news report" in a Colombo Sunday newspaper.

Army officials strenuously denied allegations of corruption in a weapons purchase from Russia made against certain military officials by the 'Sunday Leader' newspaper. The Army is denying that the incendiary rocket-type 'Schmel Launcher' purchased recently from Russia belongs to the 'chemical warfare' category, although certain Western powers, including the United States, had opted not deploy it. Army officials say that the Schmel Launcher is a powerful incendiary weapon and is similar to other powerful anti-personnel weapons commonly used in modern warfare. The new weapon would be useful in beating back the LTTE's formidable 'human wave' mass assaults, they explained.

The Russian embassy in Colombo also issued a denial that the weapon, which is manufactured by Russia and sold on the global market, was a "chemical weapon".

Before the report was published, it is learnt that the military pokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne had addressed a written appeal to the newspaper not to publish the detailed information about the type of weapon purchased.

An angry Army Commander Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalle, in a letter to the 'Sunday Leader' denying the corruption allegations, which was released to the media, stated: "I write with reference to the centre-spread article in The Sunday Leader of 12th August, 2001, headlined "Big stink over Schmel Launchers" by Frederica Jansz.

"Without prejudice to whatever legal remedy I may resort to, I write to strongly deny the wild allegations of corruption made against me, as Commander of the Army and against two other senior officers.

"It is also a matter of deep regret that despite a written request by Military Spokesman, Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne RWP RSP, to Ms. Jansz, as a responsible journalist, to exercise caution when giving publicity to the military equipment in question, for the only reason that the enemy, the LTTE would become aware, she has, it appears, chosen to completely ignore it. Fears Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne RWP RSP expressed to me when he made this request to Ms. Jansz have come right.

"The pro-LTTE Tamilnet website of 16th August, where the LTTE has, as expected, responded using your report as the only basis. They will receive a fitting reply in due course to their latest campaign for which you have so readily supplied the fuel, in the form of a malicious and mischievous report. Must I say this not only compromises the nation's national security interests but also places the lives of our troops, and even our citizens, in jeopardy.

"I have requested both the Ministry of Defence and the Permanent Commission for Bribery and Corruption to conduct investigations into the allegations your newspaper has made, however frivolous they are. If you, as you boldly state, have any evidence to prove the claims made by your newspaper, I would request you to make them available to the investigators.

"The outcome of such investigations, I am sure, will reveal to the public that your article in question is one of the many witch hunts embarked by your newspaper purely to vilify people in public life to satisfy vested interests."

● UN Envoy Wants CJ to Step Aside

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of the judiciary has written to the Sri Lankan Government requesting that Chief Justice Sarath Silva step aside until the impeachment motion against him is disposed of, while a delegation of international jurists have been prevented from visiting the country to assess the rule of law here.

The UN special rapporteur on the independence of the judiciary, Param Coomaraswamy, is reported to have written to President Chandrika Kumaratunga through Sri Lanka's ambassador in Geneva requesting her to ensure that Chief Justice Sarath Silva who is facing an impeachment motion by the combined opposition in Parliament steps down from the bench, and also refrains from constituting benches until such time the select committee probing his conduct disposes of the charges against him.

Legal sources point out that the UN special rapporteur's suggestion to the President to ask the chief justice to step aside could be construed as an interference by the Executive under Sri Lanka's constitution which has separation of powers enshrined in it. They have suggested that the UN representative writes directly to the chief justice instead, but UN protocol prohibits him from dealing other than with governments.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson has in the meantime also written to the Sri Lankan government requesting permission and dates for the UN Special Rapporteur to visit the country to assess the independence of the judiciary, but the government has yet to respond to her request.

Meanwhile, Lord Brennan, a former Chairman of the Bar Council of England and a ruling Labour Party peer who was to head a delegation to Colombo beginning next week on behalf of the International Bar Association (IBA) to assess the rule of law situation in the country, was refused a visa to enter the country by the High Commission in London.

Former IBA president Desmond Fernando said that Lord Brennan had been told that he could not be given a visa because he had no confirmed appointments in Colombo. When the High Commission had been told that Justice Minister Batty Weerakoon and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe had given him appointments, the High Commission had turned around and said that Lord Brennen could not be given a visa because Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was not available for a meeting.

Lord Brennen had requested to meet Mr. Kadirgamar and President Kumaratunga along with the rest of the IBA delegation comprising Mr. Kyatt, chairman of the Bar Council of Malaysia and Justice Malimath, a former chief justice of Karnataka state in India. Both Mr. Kyatt and Justice Malimath had been granted visas, but last morning Justice Malimath received a telephone call from Sri Lanka's deputy high commission in Chennai to say that his visa was being withdrawn. No reasons were given.

Justice Malimath had indicated a willingness to go to Colombo notwithstanding the cancellation of the visa, but had spoken to India's High Commissioner in Colombo Gopal Gandhi and decided to skip the visit.

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry in Colombo said that the IBA had requested a visa for Lord Brennen to visit Colombo only the day before he was scheduled to leave London. The IBA was informed that the visit on the days proposed would not be convenient by the Government given the shortness of the notice.

"It is an accepted principle that any international organisation, even a UN body, wishing to undertake a mission of this nature should seek the concurrence of the Government," the spokesman said.

The Government is learnt to have requested the IBA to reschedule the proposed visit for mutually agreed dates. "The IBA delegation is welcome to visit Colombo on such agreed dates during which arrangements could be made for them to meet such Ministers and other Government officials as may be available," the spokesman added.

He said that the UN's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression Abid Hussein would be in Sri Lanka on mutually agreed dates in November for discussions with the Government leaders on media freedom and other issues in Sri Lanka.

Among the issues the IBA was to study during the stay in Sri Lanka was the President's decision to prorogue Parliament, the holding of a referendum to enshrine a new constitution, the question of amending or enacting a new constitution through extra-parliamentary methods and the independence of the judiciary.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry has warned diplomats and foreign funded NGOs that statements by them on the current Sri Lankan situation might amount to an interference in the country's internal affairs. The ministry in a note to members of the diplomatic corps, UN offices and specialised agencies said such public statement whether solicited or otherwise would be contrary to the well-established norms of diplomatic conduct and practice. It has invited the attention of resident diplomatic missions to the relevant provisions of the Vienna Convention relating to the Diplomatic Relations, in particular Article 41.

The Foreign Ministry has stated that if any diplomat or diplomatic mission wished to make any representation, it could be done through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or with its knowledge.

● LTTE Airport Attack: Aftershocks on Economy

Aug 19 - Sri Lanka's exports had dipped and growth forecasts were already in tatters when the Tigers attacked the country's only international airport, but the aftershocks are taking a heavier toll.

Nearly four weeks after the attack on the Bandaranaike International Airport where four civilian passenger jets were completely destroyed and two more damaged, the economy is reeling. Thousands of jobs are being cut.

Sri Lanka's tourism industry, which celebrated a record number of foreign holiday-makers in June this year, is now dire straits. Dozens of hotels are closing down. Scores remain empty. Thousands of employees are being laid off.

The July 24 attack on the airport saw an immediate increase in insurance premiums on aircraft entering Sri Lanka. Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific airlines pulled out while others curtailed flights to Colombo.

The war-risk insurance slapped on aircraft was extended to ships calling at the island's only Colombo sea port recently. At least 10 international shipping lines either cut down calls to Sri Lanka or completely pulled out.

"This is no longer a port and airport issue," said Prakrama Dissanayake, the vice president of Ceylon Association of Shipping Agents (CASA). "The entire economy will be affected by this crisis unless we do something fast," he said

adding, "Many have still not understood the gravity of the problem."

In a bid to offset the effects of high insurance, the government has reduced oil prices for ships re-fuelling at the Colombo port to rates applicable in Singapore. The move was to encourage international liners to call at Colombo where 60 percent of its cargo capacity was eliminated when the 10 international lines decided to cut services.

The government also liberalised entry to cargo carriers at the Colombo airport where as an added incentive all aircraft bringing in more than 200 passengers will not be charged ground handling fees.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga earlier this month told business leaders that the attack on the airport was the "most horrendous against an economic target" ever carried out by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who have been battling the government for decades. She warned that the country might not be able to keep to its economic goals this year because of the airport attack and a global economic slowdown.

Even the official figures are ominous. Exports had dropped by 1.5 percent in the first half of the year to 2.4 billion dollars, according to the Central Bank's latest figures.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported last week that Sri Lanka's economic growth in the first half of this year was a dismal 1.0 percent, compared with an original forecast of three to four percent.

Given the rebel attack on July 24 and the fallout in tourism as well as the import-export sectors which account for more than a third of the country's GDP, Sri Lanka could be heading for more difficult times, warned the IMF.

"Notwithstanding satisfactory performance through June, indications are that the budget is likely to come under increasing pressure in the second half of 2001," the IMF said adding "The recent airport attack has also negatively impacted on the budget and revenues from tourism and exports, as well as the general business confidence."

However, there was a minor respite for consumers amid the gloom and doom. Prices of eggs, meat, vegetables, fish, prawns and lobsters have come down drastically due to poor demand from tourist hotels.

Sri Lankan farmers have been scrambling to sell eggs and chicken as demand plummets due to a sharp fall in the number of holiday-makers. The All Island Poultry Farmers Association said egg prices have fallen below the cost of production. An association spokesman said prices fell by a third in three weeks. "Even to sell at below our cost of production has become a struggle," he said, adding that 90 minute night-time power cuts have aggravated the problems for the food industry. "We are in a soup," he said in exasperation.

● UN Body on Victor Ivan's Complaint

The Human Rights Committee(HRC) of the UN Human Rights Commission has rejected the Attorney General's preliminary objections in an appeal filed before it by Ravaya Editor Victor Ivan and requested the Sri Lankan Government to submit within six months its explanation regarding the Editor's complaint.

Mr. Ivan alleged that the three indictments filed against him in the Colombo High Court for criminal defamation were without proper assessment, presented indiscriminately and arbitrarily with a design to harass him.

The Geneva-based HRC, under the Optional Protocol to the Political and Civl Rights Covenant, has found the complaint admissible for the consideration of merits and requested the Sri Lankan Government to submit within six months written explanations clarifying the matter and indicating the measures if any, that have been taken.

In its decision the HRC took the view that though the indictments were filed prior to Sri Lanka acceding to the Optional Protocol, the consequences of such indictments continue, constituting new violations which the committee is competent to look into.

It rejected a claim posed by the Attorney General of Sri Lanka that the editor had failed to exhaust domestic remedies, concluding the Supreme Court is the highest court of the land and an application before it as employed by the editor constitutes the last domestic judicial remedy.

On December 17, 1999 the editor made a complaint to the UNHRC stating the Attorney General had failed to exercise his discretion in the filing of the three indictments for criminal defamation against him on June 29, 1996, March 31, 1997 and September 30, 1997 thereby violating his freedom of expression and his right to equality and equal protection of the law guaranteed respectively by Article 19 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

He claimed his rights under Article 2 (3) of the Covenant had been impinged upon and an effective remedy deprived when the Supreme Court had refused Leave to Proceed with his Fundamental Rights application to suspend the indictments on the same grounds as guaranteed under Articles 14 (1) (a) and 12(1) of the Constitution.

The Attorney General said that Article 19 (3) of the Covenant carried with it special duties and responsibilities and may be subject to restrictions provided by law necessary for the respect of the rights and reputations of the others.

It was submitted that the editor had not exhausted all available domestic remedies including making representations either to the Attorney General, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration or to the Human Rights Commission. Further the Attorney General pointed out that the Editor had not established violation of any rights under the Covenant for which remedies were available under the Sri Lankan Constitution.

● Truth Commission Calls for Evidence

Members of the Presidential Truth Commission on Ethnic Violence on 10 August called upon persons affected by ethnic violence during the period between 1981 and 1984 to provide evidence before an inquiry which will commence shortly.

The commission will inquire into the nature, causes and extent of violations of human rights and damage to property caused as a part of ethnic violence during the period between 1981 and 1984 with special reference to July 1983. The commission appointed by the President comprises Retired Chief Justice S. Sharvananda, Sathyaloka Sasita Sahabandu, P.C. and Mohamed Mohamed Zuhair. Public sittings will begin once preliminary representations are made, a member of the Truth Commission M. M. Zuhair said.

The commission told a press conference recently that they will receive representation-evidence of such violations from persons living in Sri Lanka and abroad orally or by written statement or

by way of photographs, video cassette recordings, sound recordings or other until October 15. They said the commission expected to complete its work by January 23, 2002. The period for submissions will be extended depending on the response.

Asked about the delay in beginning such a process after a period of about 18 years since the incidents in question and the haste in completing the inquiry within a short period of 3 months, M. M. Zuhair said they were carrying out a job handed down to them. "We agree that it is late but it is never too late to discover the truth" he said adding that it was a challenging task which required the co-operation of all citizens of the country.

Chairman of the Commission former Chief Justice S. Sharvananda said that the commission sought the truth of what happened and who was responsible and would consider necessary steps to prevent a recurrence.

Answering a question as to what action would be taken against persons who are currently holding a position of authority if it is proved that they had resorted to violence during such period, Mr. Zuhair said "the aim of the commission is to ascertain the causes that led to the incidents and prevent a recurrence. The idea is not to go after and penalise such persons".

Asked what the purpose was of spending such a lot of money on a process where punishment is not meted out to perpetrators, with the likelihood of them repeating such actions again, he said that the commission's principle task was not punishing but getting on to a dealing process.

"The idea of the commission is to heal and this may hinder the healing process", Mr. Sahabandu added. He said that the South African experience with a similar commission was a success.

Answering a question as to whether this was not an attempt at political victimisation of the UNP as the period specified relates to the period of their regime, members of the commission said it was merely a coincidence. Asked whether their work was not going to be used by people on a witch hunt, "we can't help it, they could do anything with it", a member said.

The commission will shortly advertise in the local press while also informing locals and expatriates through a website and through foreign embassies of the inquiry which is to proceed shortly and the request for written submissions. Persons coming forward to give such evidence may testify in public or in camera, while the identity of such persons will be protected, the commission stated.

● Church Leaders Urge Multiparty Natioinal Govt

Church leaders in Sri Lanka urged leaders of political parties to give the highest priority for the welfare of the people in all their deliberations stated press release issued by the National Christian Council.

The Council has always advocated the need for a new Constitution. The new constitution most include the abolition of the executive Presidency, the establishment of Commissions and maximum devolution of power to facilitate the resolution of the ethnic conflict and bring this cruel war to to an end", the statement said.

The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka expresses its concern over the current political development in the country and urges all political leaders to have the welfare of the people as the highest priority in all their deliberations and actions.

The Council has always advocated the need for a new constitution to enhance the democratic space in the country. The new Constitution must include the abolition of the Executive Presidency, the establishment of commissions to ensure the absolute independence of the Police, Judiciary, Public Service, Elections and the Media, and maximum devolution of power to facilitate the resolution of the ethnic conflict and bring this cruel war to an end. However, the timing of the proposed Referendum seeking a mandate for a new constitution from the people, calls for a serious review.

The prorogation of parliament at a time when the confidence of the Government was being democratically put to the test, coupled with such a Referendum, will not serve the cardinal principles for which a new constitution is aspired for by the people. It is being interpreted as a measure to stall the voice and will of the people through their representatives and will only serve to accentuate and postpone the crisis. The need of the hour is therefore, primarily to restore democratic space by permitting the democratic process to manifest and express itself. Political strategizing for obtaining or protecting party interests runs diametrically opposite to this," the statement added.

This is not the time for political parties to be accusing each other, for all are to be blamed for the national crisis that we experience today.

The affirmation of the welfare of the nation as the ultimate priority, accommodative and consultative politics, and an environment where all the representatives of the people, regardless of party affiliation, work clearly with a spirit of service, sacrifice and reconciliation. A national priority must be the establishment of a new political culture through which a political space will emerge for the strengthening of democratic institutions ushering peace and the development of the country.

With this in mind the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka calls upon the President, as a gesture of goodwill to:

(a) Review the order proroguing Parliament; and the proclamation calling for a Referendum;

(b) Liaise with the Leader of the Opposition and all other parties in Parliament to establish an Interim Multi Party National Government committed to a minimum programme on Peace, Development and Democracy. ❐

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Playing Political Chess with People

Colombo Correspondent

President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe should equally share the blame for the current political, constitutional and socio-economic imbroglio in Sri Lanka. They have been more concerned with their parties and their future at the expense of the country and its people.

"These people have gone crazy," summed up a senior western diplomat. "They are engaged in a game of political chess while the country is burning."

On August 14 they checkmated each other: President Kumaratunga and UNP leader Wickremesinghe asked saboteurs to leave their respective parties without causing any further damage.

At a meeting of PA party members at the President's House President Kumaratunga said there were one or two dangerous men in the party. "Their presence is a great danger and they should leave the party," she said without naming who they were. It is implied that she had referred to persons like Ministers S.B. Dissanayake, Prof. G.L. Peiris, Mahinda Wijesekera and MEP Parliamentarian Bandula Gunawardene who had criticised the President in recent press interviews and public meetings. They have said the President was mishandling the present situation.

Wickremesinghe at a meeting at the UNP headquarters, 'Sirikotha', said if there were anyone who wanted to prop up the PA they could do so publicly without having secret meetings. "Let them go and join the crumbling PA," he said, adding that he felt no one at this juncture would cross over from the UNP to a sinking ship. His reference was to senior members Rukman Senanayake and Tyronne Fernando who had series of meetings with Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake.

Wickremesinghe ordered the UNP general secretary to take disciplinary action against members who violate party discipline by making contradictory statements about the party stand on the present political crisis. There were press reports over the weekend that Rukman Senanayake had extensive discussions with the Prime Minister and Tyronne Fernando with a government delegation comprising ministers Anurutha Ratwatte, Lakshman Kadirgamar and Mangala Samaraweera.

Embattled President Kumaratunga whose government lost its parliamentary majority on June 20 when seven lawmakers belonging to Sri Lanka Muslim Congress crossed over to the opposition made the first move to prorogue parliamentary sittings till Sep-

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tember 7 to stave off certain defeat if the opposition no-confidence motion was debated. To distract public attention from that action she announced a referendum on the question of the need for a new constitution. Her ploy failed and united the opposition, which turned the referendum into a no-confidence vote against her.

Senior ministers S. B. Dissanayake and G. L. Peiris opposed the holding of the referendum, Dissanayake on the ground that it could not be won and Peiris on legal basis. Peiris submitted that Article 86 under which the referendum was announced was consultative in character and its approval by the people in non-binding. Amendments to the constitution are covered by Article 85, which stipulate the need for two-third majority in parliament and the approval by the people at a referendum.

Realizing that she had placed herself in a corner and sensing defeat President Kumaratunga invited Wickremesinghe for talks about power-sharing and the formation of a national government. Talks failed because Wickremesinghe wanted to be the Prime Minister, demanded 10 portfolios in a 20-member cabinet and requested the arrangement worked out in the French constitution be adopted. President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickramanayake were not prepared for this arrangement. Wickramanayake was not prepared to relinquish his prime ministership. President Kumaratunga was not willing to bestow on Wickremesinghe the wide powers a French prime minister enjoyed and they wished to retain majority of places in the cabinet. The move to form a national government thus floundered.

LTTE's Katunayake attack and the threat of a defeat at a referendum forced the President to adopt a two-pronged strategy to checkmate the UNP-led opposition. Wickramanayake telephoned Rukman Senanayake on July 25 and told him that the government and the opposition should get together to handle the LTTE threat. They met and mapped out a scheme to share power. The Prime Minister offered to appoint Wickremesinghe the deputy prime minister and gave a list of ministries that would be given to the UNP. Ministers Ratwatte, Kasirgamar and Samaraweera met with Tyronne Fernando and was promised a good portfolio if he canvassed support from the UNP for the formation of a national government. Rukman Senanayake and Tyronne Fernando told the joint meeting of the UNP Working Committee and the Parliamentary Group that met on August 7 and strongly urged the party to join the government to save the country. The party decided that President Kumaratunga should re-summon parliament, cancel the referendum and establish the five independent commissions and take up the impeachment motion against Chief Justice Sarath Silva before discussing about the formation of a national government.

The Government also worked out an alternate strategy mainly to divide the opposition and deprive it of its majority. JVP's 10 votes thus became important to them. Contacts made with the JVP proved beneficial. Its leadership engaged in an image building exercise, an image of a law-abiding, responsible, people conscious organization, was willing to talk provided the conditions it laid were fulfilled. The conditions were: summoning of parliament, cancellation of the referendum, setting up of the five commissions and providing relief to the people. If these conditions were fulfilled the JVP assured the government that it would support the government for one year after which it should hold an election. The President postponed the referendum to October 18 to gain more time and met the JVP delegation on August 8 for a detailed discussion.

JVP said on August 9that it would support a probation government while continuing to be in opposition, without accepting positions in government. Wimal Weerawanse, Propaganda Secretary said that his party's proposal to form a probation government has been made to President Chandrika Kumaratunga, to "save the country from economic disaster and political anarchy."

"Only through 'a government on probation' that peace and stability of the country could be restored," he said adding that no final agreement had reached between the President and the JVP on their proposals He reiterated "the establishment of independent commissions for media, police, public services, judiciary and elections could be taken up for discussion only after re-summoning the prorogued parliament before September 7. Thereafter the JVP will extend support to a program of action agreed by all."

The JVP delegation specifically told President Kumaratunga to discontinue peace negotiations with the LTTE. The President and the Prime Minister started praising JVP leaders as disciplined men who were not interested in positions and self-advancement. This naturally aroused the suspicion of JVP leaders who realized that they are being tricked to break ranks from the common opposition. They issued a warning to the government that their conditions should be fulfilled before August end.

Prospects of a government-JVP understanding have fuelled fears among the private sector and the diplomatic community. It also created opposition inside the government. Senior ministers rejected the JVP proposals made to President Chandrika Kumaratunga as unacceptable.

Minister S. B. Dissanayake said the JVP proposal to establish a caretaker government and hold elections within one year should not be accommodated. He added that the President should not seek an alliance with an extremist party like the JVP, but should attempt to reach consensus with other political parties in order to address the crisis situation in the country. Minister Mahinda Wijeysekera also said that the JVP proposals cannot be accepted, and that the government should not give into conditional demands put forward by the JVP in order that it will support the government on key issues

The opposition is now on a warpath. It is preparing to impeach the president. It held 70 meeting in the provinces to whip up the opposition to the government. It would meet on August 16 in a Committee Room of Parliament to pass a resolution against the Government, And on August 21 it is planning a march to Colombo similar to the one held on July 19.

The pressure now is on the President. The combined opposition, which forms a majority in the 225-member assembly, has called for the immediate restoration of parliament, which Kumaratunga shut down for two months. It has also called for her resignation. The political deadlock continues. ❐

Away from Confrontation And Unilateral Solutions

Jehan Perera

The LTTE's attack on the Katunayake airforce base and the adjoining international airport makes it clear that the central problem facing the country is the war. It is destroying the country, its economy and its people. The loss of life, the burnt out shells of military and civilian aircraft, and closure of the country's only international airport constitute a shocking wake-up call to the country's leadership.

This dual military-civilian attack comes after a lull of over eight months in which the LTTE refrained from major attacks anywhere in the country. But by this attack the LTTE has escalated the war and its economic costs to all levels of society. Whatever the merits of its attack against military aircraft, the deliberate destruction of very expensive civilian aircraft belonging to Sri Lankan Airlines cannot be condoned. It is likely that this attack, and the signals it gives, will make the pursuit of a negotiated peace all the more difficult.

At the same time it is also a matter of dismay that the government is using this incident to politically attack the UNP, which is the main opposition party. The government needs to desist from confrontational politics at this critical stage and to work towards obtaining the cooperation of the opposition to overcome the present crisis. This time of crisis is not one in which the country's mainstream political parties should be battling it out with one another. Nor is it the time for mutual recriminations.

Disasters that take place in a polarized polity inevitably tend to increase those divisions. It is entirely probably that government supporters will be blaming the opposition for diverting the government's attention away from dealing effectively with the LTTE through its no-confidence motion. On the other hand, opposition supporters are likely to see a greater justification for the no-confidence motion in the government's failure to deal with the LTTE either through peace or war.

While the vast majority of people would be looking for salvation from the present situation, there is unlikely to be a mass upsurge of support for one side or the other. There is only likely to be a more polarized and acrimonious division with blame being heaped onto one side or the other. So far the political battle between the government and opposition has been conducted according to the law and the constitution.

The prorogation of Parliament by the President was within the law. As the leader of a political party, and head of the government, the President took action that was within the scope of her powers to protect her government. There is no denying that the main objective of a political leader is to obtain power and to keep it. But in taking the political debate outside of Parliament, where the government has lost its majority, and directly to the people is a double-edged sword. When the doors of Parliament are shut to the opposition, it is inevitable that they will have to take to the streets. There is a parallel to remember. When the 6th amendment to the constitution closed the door to the democratic Tamil parties in Parliament, the hand of the Tamil militancy was strengthened, and the crisis was taken to a new and higher level.

No Win-Lose Solutions

In a critical, if not perilous time like this, logical thinking needs to take priority over partisan arguments. The opposition needs to keep in mind that taking the streets at a time when the Tiger is literally within the gates is fraught with consequences of terrible proportions. Ironically, the crisis that the country is confronted with following the disaster at Katunayake provides the political leadership of the government and opposition with an opportunity. Without losing face, both sides can back down from the path of escalating confrontation that they had been taking. Hopefully they will be realising that they cannot achieve victory on their own terms.

In a polarized and divided polity, parties cannot act unilaterally and succeed. There are no win-lose solutions to the major problems of the day that can be sustainable. In such a polity, problems cannot be solved outright and immediately, they can only be managed and accommodated to begin with. Conflict resolution calls for a negotiated settlement in a win-win spirit in which both sides gain. This holds true whether it is conflict resolution at the centre between the government and opposition, or conflict resolution in the north-east with the LTTE.

The fact is that President Chandrika Kumaratunga won a presidential election not even a year ago. She is vested with the enormous powers of the executive presidency. With those enormous powers and with her unequalled charisma, she is there to stay and cannot be wished or impeached away. The second reality is that the government has lost its majority in Parliament. While the President's action of proroguing Parliament for two months has delayed the vote of no-confidence, such maneuvers cannot lead to any permanent resolution of the problem. The mounting protests against the President's decision to prorogue Parliament and the decision to hold a referendum unlikely to cease, though the referendum has been postponed. The stakes are too high. The third reality is the power of the LTTE. From their jungle hide-outs, both in the Wanni and the urban jungle of Colombo, they can destroy the future of this country. They have to be engaged with and that engagement has to be political.

Avoiding political suicide

In a recent speech, President Kumaratunga justified her government's present course of action as the way to achieve peace. But the war is between the government and LTTE. There can be no peace in the foreseeable future without the LTTE being brought into the process. Unfortunately, it seems that the government's present course of action has ignored the LTTE. The government could have done more to encourage the Norwegian peace initiative. For the past half year hardly any progress has been made n the peace process. Proroguing Parliament and calling for a vaguely worded referendum on a new constitution is not the way to peace.

The democratic governance of a fragmented and multi-ethnic society that is trapped in a civil war is definitely not like a game of chess. In chess the two players

can move the pieces about at will to win the game. But governing a plural society is entirely different. It is a responsibility of the most serious proportions in which the legitimacy of institutions has to be preserved because the very lives of the people are at stake. If a step by step descent into the pit of political suicide is to be avoided, the government and opposition have no option but to negotiate with each other. They need to jointly devise a suitable political framework by which unilateral actions of grave political consequence will not be taken any more, and to jointly take steps to engage in negotiations with the LTTE, after which the people's consent for constitutional reform may be obtained at a referendum. Only a consensual solution will be viable in the long term.

This would require negotiations between those who have been long-time political opponents or even enemies. It will require a sharing of power, giving up of a portion of power currently enjoyed and also a giving up of the dream of obtaining total power for oneself.

The Malaysian Seminar

The nation appears fragmented at every level, with the political crisis taking centre stage. But change is a law of life, though it is often resisted and sometimes ignored. The holding of an international seminar on the Sri Lankan conflict in Malaysia last month was an example. The seminar was on the theme of "Reconciliation and Nation-building in Sri Lanka." The title the organisers had chosen for the seminar was clearly one that approached peace from a positive perspective.

But the seminar was a controversial one, though not in Sri Lanka, where it has scarcely been noted at all. The controversy began some months ago. There was a news item on Tamil Net that the Sri Lankan government was trying to prevent an international seminar from being held. This, it transpired, was the seminar in Malaysia. The question was whether the government, in particular the Foreign Ministry, should have tried to stop the seminar from being held at all. In the modern world, the freedom of intellectual exchange is a very sacred one.

The notion that a government would try to stop an intellectual exchange from taking place is damaging in itself. Perhaps the reason for the government's effort to stop the seminar was its concern that the outcome would be biased and unfavourable to Sri Lanka. One of the organisers of the event was the strategic studies department within the National University of Malaysia, in which Prof. Dagmar Helmen Rajana-yagam was the main organiser. The other was the Malaysian Ceylonese Congress. Thus the co-organisers of the event were members of the small community of Tamils of Sri Lankan origin in Malaysia.

The past track record of international conferences organised by expatriate Tamils has been a chequered one. In the past Prof. Dagmar Rajanayagam has written books that have looked at the Tamil struggle, and the LTTE in particular, in a favourable light. Therefore it was perhaps reasonable for the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry to look upon the seminar with scepticism. But even so, to try to block a seminar from being held in a foreign country was not a sensible public relations exercise.

Anyone who has matured in a liberal intellectual environment would be instinctively opposed to a government effort to block an intellectual exercise. If that exercise was a biased one, those who are independent minded would know it to be so. This has been the fate of many LTTE-organised seminars in the past.

The Malaysian seminar was organised in an essentially fair manner. There were LTTE representatives and pro-LTTE speakers at the event, such as V Rudrakumaran, Fr S J Emmanuel and Prof. Peter Schalk. But there were also several top rung international academics of independent standing such as Prof. Partha Ghosh and Prof. Michael Roberts, as well as political analysts and activists from Sri Lanka such as Dr P Saravanamuttu and Dr Jayampathy Wickremaratne who were well equip-ped to provide a balanced view from a Sri Lankan perspective.

Need for Respite from War

The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry needs to build on the success it ach-ieved, and go beyond it. When the present government came to power six years ago, the international image of the Sri Lankan government was poor, and the LTTE were on top of the public relations battle. But this has changed over the past six years. This was evident in the bitter complaints of the pro-LTTE speakers at the seminar. They castigated the international community for being biased against the Tamil struggle.

But improving the image of the country and discrediting the LTTE should not become an end in itself. The end is the achievement of peace and the creation of conditions of prosperity in the country. Unless peace is achieved soon, the positive image that the government currently enjoys internationally is likely to evaporate. The negative travel advisories given by several foreign governments to their citizens regarding travel to Sri Lanka after the LTTE attack on the airport may be the harbinger of worse to come. The government has to go beyond seeking to discredit the LTTE at every turn. Unless peace is achieved the positive image that the government currently is likely to be lost. The government needs to seek to engage with the LTTE and utilise the full backing of the international community, which it can have, if it chooses the path of political negotiations. More than anything else the country needs a respite from war. In practical terms it needs a ceasefire. After the LTTE attack on Katunayake, the economy has been severely affected.

The livelihoods of tens of thousands are at stake. Freight and insurance rates have been jacked up tremendously. There are some indications that the government may seek to retaliate heavily against the LTTE for the blow it struck at Katunayake, with the army mobilising its forces in Jaffna. There is also air bombing that is taking place. But all of this will serve to give the LTTE another justification to attack Colombo again.

The seminar in Malaysia was evidence that there is change in the air, and that responsible sections of Tamil opinion are seeking ways out of the morass that the country and all of its people are trapped in. Perhaps they are sensing the desperate desire of the people of the north-east for peace.

The postponement of the referendum by the President was another positive indication of the workings a democracy in which those in positions of power are responsive to public opinion in the south which mobilised massively against the referendum. The political parties need to be similarly alive to the ethnic conflict and to the people's desire, both north and south, for it to end, so that they may live without fear and with a growing economy. The political parties and civil society need to demonstrate the same motivation to

supporting a consensual peace process as they did to oppose the non-consensual referendum.

The seminar in Malaysia was a positive affirmation of the usefulness of meetings and dialogues in rebuilding fractured relationships among actors in civil society. There also needs to be more dialogue and less unilateralism in political society by the government, the opposition and the LTTE.

The most appropriate starting point for a renewed peace process would be an internationally monitored cease-fire between the government and LTTE that would create the conditions for peace talks, reconciliation and nation-building.

But unfortunately the attention of the government and opposition parties appears to be riveted elsewhere. The devastating LTTE attack on the Katunayake airport and airforce base brought the ethnic conflict back to the centre stage of politics only for a short while, not for long. Once again it appears that the war has been overshadowed by the political struggle for power at the centre. There appears to have been some progress in the direction of the formation of a stable government. But there appears to be very little being done about restarting the stalled peace process.

Political Deadlock - A Way Out

The country has come to its sorriest situation in more than a decade, and it has done so under the People's Alliance government led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga. The lack of hope in the future is reminiscent of the 1988/89 period when death squads roamed the country, and migration to foreign countries seemed to be the only path to individual betterment. In the present situation the worst option for the country is that the PA should continue to rule the country by itself. The government has shown itself incompetent to rule by itself.

For a brief moment an alliance of the government with the JVP seemed possible. But it appears that the price being demanded by the JVP for cooperation with the government was too high. When the JVP demanded that the peace process with the LTTE be suspended, they seemed to desire a worsening of the ethnic conflict and its inevitable economic fall-out. For a Marxist revolutionary party like the JVP, an increase in popular despair is a fertile ground for their own advancement.

The indications at present are that the government's negotiations with the JVP are falling through. With earlier efforts to reach an accommodation with the UNP being unsuccessful, the only remaining option for the government is to rule by itself, with President Kumaratunga utilising all the presidential powers at her disposal.

In this context there is a constitutional fact that needs to be recognised. President Kumaratunga is the elected executive president of the country, and the constitution vests enormous powers in that office. By virtue of her election as president in November 1999, President Kumaratunga enjoys by right the power to wield those enormous presidential powers for a further four years. Not even the loss of her government's parliamentary majority can change the reality of President Kumaratunga's presidential powers. This is a reality that cannot be wished away. Nor is it likely to be negotiated away.

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It is a great pity that despite her great powers President Kumaratunga has not been able to demonstrate a crucially important quality for governing a fragmented and polarised society. She has been unable to bring those who represent different sections of society together. She has preferred to attack and weaken them rather than to be gracious and accommodative and share power and responsibility with them. Those members of her government who could have influenced her in that direction failed in their duty. If the government's deal with the JVP does not go through, then there is only one alternative to continued unilateral rule by the present government and further movement to national disaster. This is for the main opposition party, the UNP, to join her in a partnership and work jointly to rescue the nation from an unhappy fate. Certainly the vast majority of Sri Lankans would be very happy if such a joining of the government and UNP takes place, especially with the participation of the ethnic minority parties.

Demanding a High Price

However, despite exhortations by numerous businesses, civic and religious organisations for the formation of such a government of national unity and reconciliation, there has been no success as yet. A key reason for the failure of the government and UNP to be able to join together is the high price being demanded by the UNP from the government. The UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has demanded the powers of an executive Prime Minister so that he can appoint ministers and allocate their portfolios.

Undoubtedly, Mr Wickremesinghe is being pushed in this direction by those members of his party who smell blood and think that the PA is doomed, if not immediately, then in a matter of months or years. But what these members of the UNP are scenting is the blood of a nation, which cannot afford any more delays in resolving its conflicts.

Perhaps there is also another reason why Mr Wickremesinghe is taking a hard line on the issue of his powers in a national government. As the alternative leader of the country, he does not wish to fail in his efforts at problem-solving if he joins the government. If he too shows himself to be a failure, there will be no one else of stature that the country can look towards. Therefore, he may want to be able to pick the team of ministers he has confidence in to solve the massive problems facing the country. The problem with Ranil Wickremesinghe's position when he asks for the powers of an executive Prime Minister is that those powers are more than what President Kumaratunga is willing to concede to anyone, and not just to him. As executive Prime Minister he is asking for virtually everything and making her a mere cipher. If President Kumaratunga were to agree to give anyone the powers of an executive Prime Minister, she would be abdicating her executive powers, which the constitution vests in her. These are powers that she won legitimately not even two years ago, and which the electorate entrusted to her. While President Kumaratunga may be willing to share some of her powers with the UNP, it is not reasonable to expect her to abdicate her powers in their entirety.

Therefore the country finds itself locked in a political deadlock in which the opposition leader wants to have full executive powers and the President is not prepared to concede them. From a logical point of view, it is far more reasonable to expect the person who has little or no power to request only half or less of that power, than to expect the person who legitimately wields power to surrender all power.

Accordingly, a problem-solving approach to the present political deadlock would suggest that Ranil Wickremesinghe should stop demanding the post of executive Prime Minister. If he feels that he cannot be expected to resolve the country's problems without those powers, and under President Kumaratunga, that is understandable. But then he must permit another member of his party to lead the UNP team within a government of national unity and reconciliation headed by President Kumaratunga.

In other words, one way out of the present political deadlock would be for UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe to permit his deputy, Karu Jayasuriya, or someone else, to temporarily lead the UNP team in a national government. As for Mr Wickremesinghe himself, he need not join the national government as a minister or Prime Minister, but he can remain outside it as leader of the UNP. This act of sacrifice for the national interest will undoubtedly impress the whole country favourably, and stand him in good stead in the more peaceful years that lie ahead.

A Precedent

There is a precedent for such an alliance between the government and opposition, in which the opposition sent only its "second eleven" to join the government and bail it out of trouble. In 1964, Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike invited the LSSP to join her government. The LSSP agreed and Anil Moonesinghe and Cholmondely Goonawardena joined the government. But the LSSP's top leadership, including Dr N M Perera and Dr Colvin R de Silva remained outside the government. They neither lost their leadership of the party as a result of staying out of the government nor were they tainted by the subsequent failure of the government.

Accordingly UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe can permit the UNP's deputy leader Karu Jayasuriya to temporarily lead the UNP into a national government in which the UNP only gets a share of the power. Mr Jayasuriya can be entrusted with the mission of getting the national government to create the proper conditions for Sri Lanka's peace and prosperity. This would necessarily include restarting the Norwegian-facilitated peace process and negotiating a mutually acceptable cease-fire with the LTTE, along with other measures for good governance such as forming the independent commissions. The willingness of UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe to sacrifice his position in it may be an inducement to President Kumaratunga to be agreeable to genuinely sharing her own power with the opposition. The alternative scenario is so bleak that the UNP and its leader should seriously consider this option as an enlightened one at the present time. The only hope for the country is the formation of a government of national unity and reconciliation.

When the basic conditions for peace and prosperity have been laid by a national government, Ranil Wickreme-singhe will be well positioned to contest the next elections as the leader of the UNP and win the leadership of the country. Of Sri Lanka's present crop of political leaders he has the superior analytical skills and knowledge of the workings of the entire system of government that the country would greatly benefit from in its reconstruction phase. ❐

The Strong Case for an Assertive Civil Society

Amrit Muttukumaru

Sri Lanka has the dubious distinction of having the highest suicide rate in the world. At the rate we are going, the prospects are bright to collect many such negative accolades. The entire country has also been declared internationally as a 'war zone' with all its dire implications. It would seem that as a people we have a powerful death wish. How else can one interpret our tacit acquiescing of the appalling nonsense that is being passed off as governance resulting in the mayhem around us. The fallout of this is amply reflected in two current examples - the aftermath of the opposition sponsored 'no confidence' motion and the Katunayake tragedy. If not for their extremely tragic consequences to this beleaguered nation, it could even be construed as comic.

No Confidence Motion

We have the case of the prorogation of parliament by presidential edict in the context of (a) the pending motion of no confidence against the government signed by a majority of parliamentarians and presented to the speaker and (b) a motion to impeach the chief justice for personal and official conduct allegedly unbecoming. This is not only highly undemocratic and preposterous but is also a clear case of abuse of power. As if this were not enough, again by courtesy of presidential fiat we have been foisted with a non-binding meaningless referendum which poses a question which is an affront to the intelligence of even the dimwitted. This referendum has now been postponed for October 18. The best part of this saga is the ludicrous stance of leading sections of our civil society. This includes powerful sections of the clergy, 'intellectuals', 'professionals' and the business community. This group have 'appealed' to (a) the President to rescind the prorogation of parliament and the referendum and (b) believe it or not - to the opposition to "withdraw the no-confidence motion against the government". In other words, this group is giving the government on a platter what the government found difficult to achieve even with undemocratic measures.

Similar convoluted logic was exhibited by our "business leaders" in response to the police brutality in crushing the recent opposition sponsored non-violent protest march against the prorogation of parliament and the referendum. It would have been reasonable to have expected at least some tacit support from influential sections of civil society to protest campaigns based on democratic norms. On the contrary, it is outrageous that our "business leaders" led by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce are reportedly maintaining a "neutral stance" on the police brutality which resulted in two deaths and 70 persons injured. Our valiant "business leaders" are also reported to have unbelievably stated that:

"We can't pinpoint whether what the police did on Thursday is right or wrong or whether they went to the extremes. As those responsible for maintaining law and order if the government believes what the police did is right then we have to accept it." ('Daily Mirror' 21 July 2001 'Business' page).

It is due to such servility, lopsided logic and nonchalance of influential sections of civil society that we are today in this precarious state of near anarchy on the verge of social, economic and moral collapse.

The Katunayake Tragedy

The recent national tragedy at Katunayake where a handful of LTTE cadres reportedly numbering just over a dozen caused destruction in monetary terms amounting to almost a Billion Dollars has not evoked in our collective psyche the demand for the much needed responsibility and accountability. This facility should have been among the most secure locations in the entire country. In terms of physical numbers, the attack completely destroyed 8 aircraft of the Air Force and 4 aircraft of the national carrier. A number of aircraft in both categories were also damaged in various degrees.

In non-monetary terms, the damage to the national psyche and economy cannot be quantified. The entire country has now been internationally classified as a 'war zone' with all its implications which include severe constraints to the functioning of the two major openings to the outside world — our only international airport and ports. Nowhere in the world will one find in the context of a ferocious military conflict, a major Air Force base being sited adjacent to the country's only international airport, leave alone sharing the same runway!

The absence of accountability is the very core of our national tragedy in the context of a seemingly servile and indifferent civil society. When will our influential sections ever assert themselves? Just across the Palk Straits in India, cabinet ministers have resigned even after train accidents. Even when Indira Gandhi in her moment of madness resorted to a brief period of dictatorial tendencies, civil society saw to it that it was unceremonially aborted. She lost the ensuing general elections.

Sri Lanka's Agony

The agony of Sri Lanka which is on the verge of social, economic and moral collapse leading to general anarchy is mainly due to the following -

Unassertive Civil Society

The absence of vigilance by an assertive civil society - particularly the more influential sections; the steady erosion of democratic values and the resultant poor governance with almost zero accountability; the inapplicability of the rule of law in many instances; rampant corruption and crime; and the ethnic problem and the resultant war.

The absence of an assertive civil

society and the steady erosion of democratic values are the major reasons for our crisis. For the past two years, this writer has been repeatedly calling for the decisive intervention of civil society, particularly the organized business and professional community to extricate this country from imminent anarchy. It was stressed that in the context of the private sector being assigned the role of engine of growth, it is only this section of civil society that has the countervailing clout and moral obligation to cry halt to the utter nonsense that is being passed off as governance by successive governments. Several pleas for "civil society to wake-up" in spite of suggested specific plans of action, have sadly to date not resulted in any meaningful movement in this direction. On the contrary, we are witnessing a shocking response which can be construed as tacit acquiescing and servile.

After all it is the vigilance of an assertive civil society that not only oils the wheels of a vibrant democracy but also is the very basis of human progress. It is the absence of this that has resulted in our pathetic condition where we are today on the brink of anarchy. Just one glaring example will highlight this state. The recent forcible occupation by students of the aesthetic institute of the residence of the Colombo municipal commissioner and the inaction of the police in spite of an official complaint by the municipality is symptomatic of the rot in this country. The reason for the 'occupation' is the stated lack of facilities. It is the duty of the state to provide this. But this in no way can justify the forced occupation of another's property. If this can be seemingly countenanced by the state itself, need we say more about the anarchy in this country?

So far we have not had any meaningful protest from civil society, although the sanctity of private property is the very basis of progress in a liberal private sector driven economic system. Under the circumstances, what chance have we for any serious investments be it foreign or local?

An Agenda for Good Governance

The dismantling of democratic values by successive governments aided by the irresponsible indifference and to some extent even the tacit approval of influential sections of civil society is at the core of the precarious condition of this country. Today we are witnessing a disgraceful political circus where the name of the game is raw power at any cost. The welfare of the country does not seem to even enter into reckoning. In spite of the catastrophe foisted on us by successive governments, we still seem to be foolishly placing our hopes on our largely power hungry and self serving politicians be they in the government or opposition. It is civil society that must be setting the agenda for democratic reforms and the durable solution of the ethnic crisis.

The democratic reforms as a minimum to be implemented within (3) three months with the required parliamentary majority must have the following features:

Seven Independent Commissions with the necessary resources for elections, police, judiciary, public service, anti-corruption, human rights and the media. To make this truly meaningful, special attention must be given to the independence and competence of the agency making appointments to these commissions as well as issues such as the period of tenure. This agency will also be the appointing authority for key sensitive appointments inclusive of the Chief Justice and judges of the supreme court, President and judges of the Court of Appeal, Attorney-General, Solicitor General, IGP, Elections Commissioner, Heads of the Public Service, anti-corruption, human rights and media commissions respectively as well as the Ombudsman.

The 'Bangladesh' type non-political caretaker administration proposed by the JVP to overseer national elections; the executive president to be accountable to parliament; the executive president to be subject to the laws of the land; fundamental and human rights to be inviolate; judicial review of legislation; the conscience vote and the possibility of cross-over of parliamentarians without losing their seats; the supremacy of the constitution; and the holding of general elections at the end of the 3 month period subsequent to the reforms.

Ethnic Crisis

It has become almost fashionable to flippantly extol the mechanism of a "negotiated settlement" as the mantra that will resolve the complex ethnic problem and the resultant war. Those advocating such a viewpoint are dead right to the extent that it is the only viable way to have a durable solution. But on the other hand, the crucial question is, to what extent is the country willing to meaningfully devolve power apart from the unit of devolution not even decided upon. The irony of it all is that there is even some semblance of unsolicited devolution in all the provinces while in the north-east where meaningful devolution is necessary, there is none. If we are honest with ourselves, it will be clear that at the present moment we just cannot afford the luxury of devolution symmetrical or otherwise to the provinces outside the north-east.

It is extremely difficult to even envisage a reasonably early solution to this crisis. Even a medium term solution seems difficult unless there is a paradigm shift in our collective mindset to permit the required devolution and other necessary measures. The much touted 'package' has undergone such radical mutilation each time it was exposed that the latest August 2000 version is a mere shadow of the original 1995 'package' reportedly crafted by the G. L. Pieris- Neelan Tiruchelvam duo. To some influential sections even the much diluted August 2000 version seems too much. Even the 'equal opportunity bill' which was presented in parliament two years was hastily withdrawn without any protest from any section.

Under these circumstances, what are we really going to discuss at any future negotiations. The Norwegian peace initiative too has been relegated to limbo. Our civil society particularly the influential sections even at this stage seem to be "fiddling while 'Sri Lanka' is burning". On the other hand, the concerns of the majority community too must be addressed in a responsible manner to allay their fears that a separate state under no circumstances will be an option. This must be guaranteed by the international community.

Conclusion

The economy which in any event was already on its knees has been virtually incapacitated by the fallout of the

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Katunayake tragedy. The entire country being declared a 'war zone' will have a crippling effect not only on the economy but also on the national psyche. Guarantees by the government from whatever level regarding the efficacy of national security will if at all, have only a marginal impact. The country has little credibility left. The only real remedy is an immediate durable negotiated solution of the ethnic crisis and the implementation of the proposed pro-democracy measures to ensure good governance. We must collectively ensure that the next national elections are conducted after the installation of the pro-democracy proposals. Failure to do so will in all probability result in a replay of 'Wayamba' and the October 2000 general elections.

If we do not wake up even at this late stage and assert ourselves decisively through all possible democratic means of protest available, we will certainly deserve the misfortune that will surely follow. But do our children and the unborn generations deserve this? There is a strong case today as never before for 'people power' centred direct action based on the 'Gandhian' principle of non- violence. Some of the measures that can be adopted include judicious civil disobedience, non-cooperation, mass protests and the use of economic, intellectual and moral power. The strength of such a strategy if threatened with violence is the sympathy of the local and international community due to the moral high ground it assures the protesters.

The lead for such an enterprise can only be given by the more influential sections of civil society particularly the organised business and professional community. For this to succeed, they will have to bring to the fore qualities such as genuine commitment for the country as a whole, a high degree of professionalism, creativity as well as most critically courage and sacrifice which have hitherto been woefully absent. Only such a miraculous metamorphosis can give this hapless country a fighting chance for a decent future.

Their track record to date in effectively responding to social issues is a disgrace. Nevertheless, whenever there is a negative fallout due also to their own folly as in the Katunayake tragedy, the business community is quick to run to the government for handouts. This is a major reason why our politicians do not take them seriously.

"Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories."

- Thomas Jefferson

Neelan Tiruchelvam, a Man of Post-nationalist Universality

Prof Ashis Nandy

(The second death anniversary of Neelan Tiruchelvam. fell on 29 July this year, and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), which he headed at the time of his assassination, held a seminar and other events to celebrate his life and work. Published here are extracts of a tribute by Prof Ashis Nandy from India)

One person who I had hoped would write my obituary was Neelan Tiruchelvam, the gifted Sri Lankan public intellectual, institution-builder and practical idealist.

He was a few years younger than me and certainly looked more energetic and fitter. I often used to brag that, after my death, my enemies would have to confront a more formidable phalanx of like-minded intellectual-activists. Neelan was one of the persons I had in mind.

Time and reality have a way of subverting our dreams. Today, I have to write his obituary. It reminds me of the old Roman-or is it Greek? - definition of the tragedy of war. War, it says, reverses the normal order of things: instead of the young burying the old, the old bury the young. Perhaps, we in South Asia will have to get used to the idea of living in a state of perpetual war in the new century.

Neelan and I met for the first time in the late 1960s at Chicago. He was then still a student and I a young, unsure researcher. We almost immediately struck up a friendship that lasted more than 30 years until, two years ago, his life was cut short by a suicide bomber in the quiet, smiling streets of Colombo. Appropriately enough, he was killed by someone from his own community.The killer and those who remote-controlled him evidently believed - like Nathuram Vinayak Godse and James Earl Ray, the assassins of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, respectively - that the ideas and their political forces their victim represented could be thus banished from public life.

Fanatics never recognise that ideas cannot be assassinated; violence only further empowers them. All the newspapers in India and abroad that I saw after the assassination described Neelan as a moderate Tamil politician. This is conventionality pushed to absurdity. Neelan was not a moderate politician, gingerly espousing a sectarian cause. He was much more radical in his vision, ideology and intellectual framework than those who killed him in the name of an ideology precariously perched on nineteenth-century concepts of nation-state, nationalism and revolutionary violence.

The federal, decentralised polity that he fought for in Sri Lanka was part of a larger vision that encompassed the whole of South Asia, still ruled by a culture of politics that was essentially a creation of the first generation of post-independence leaders, inspired by their exposure to-and admiration for-European imperial states.

This culture of politics depended heavily upon bureaucracies that were illegitimate progenies of colonialism and the wog imperium it left behind. In such a culture, a centralised, all-powerful nation-state, modelled on colonial regimes, was one of the axioms of public life. To question it was to question sanity and reason, apart from patriotism. Not merely many of his friends, but even his assassins must have loathed that part of Neelan's vision.

Neelan was also one of the few scholars in South Asia who worked in the critical area of law and society and established it during the 1970s and 1980s as a crucial area of social knowledge in the region. Neelan was a practising lawyer in addition to being a practising social scientist and politician. Indeed, his vision mediated between his intellectual and his public life. They were means of establishing a dialogue between vision, institutions and scholarship. I sometimes suspect that it was his exposure to politics that

gave the touch of generosity and tolerance to Neelan's endeavours.

Many, who talk of his moderation, have in mind actually his inclusiveness and his capacity to work with immense diversities. Yet, paradoxically, both these traits transcended his politics. They had something to do with his ethical self.

Among the dozens of obituaries of Neelan I have read, one of the few that have moved me deeply is by Veena Das. In it she recognises that his compassion would have even included in its scope the young suicide-bomber who took his life, fired by ideologies of violence, hatred and self-destruction that were designed to give meaning to an otherwise empty life. He would have sensed that the killer did not have much control over his own life and actions in any case. Neelan Tiruchelvam was one of the great South Asians I have had the privilege to know. His post-nationalist universality had deep roots in Sri Lankan politics and culture and reflected his capacity to embody that embattled, threatened species: the Sri Lankan Tamil, proudly Sri Lankan and proudly Tamil.

Of those thus sacrificed at the altar of chauvinism and blood-thirstiness, Neelan was one of the most irreplaceable. He had to be killed, probably because he could so confidently and gracefully cross the barriers of states, cultures, religions and nationalities, both within Sri Lanka and outside. His life itself must have looked like a protest against all forms of chauvinism and ethno-religious nationalism. By being himself, he could be, as I have already pointed out, a formidable enemy.

The space for South Asia as an intellectual, political and cultural entity has shrunk with Neelan Tiruchelvam's senseless death. I feel old and tired. ❐

Sanctified Vandalism as a Political Tool

Yoginder Sikand

The recent destruction of a centuries-old mosque in a small town in Rajasthan and the construction of a temple in its place points to a recurring theme in India history - the use of sanctified vandalism as a political tool. In recent years, ever since the campaign to destroy the Babri Masjid was launched, we have been fed with constant propaganda that the destruction of places of worship was a fine art that Muslims, fired with an irrepressible iconoclastic zeal, had mastered. Yet, as the recent Rajasthani case so clearly suggests, others have been, and continue to be, guilty of the sin as well.

It is true that, as the historical records show, that some Muslim kings did indeed destroy Hindu temples. This even Muslims themselves would hardly dispute. In assessing the historical record, however, certain precautions are necessary. Most importantly, a distinction must be made between Islamic commandments, on the one hand, and the acts of individual Muslims on the other. The Quran in no way sanctions the destruction of the places of worship of people of other faiths. For the most part, Muslims have abided by the Quranic injunction that 'there is no compulsion in religion'.

Thus, for instance, after Muhammad bin Qasim, leading the first Muslim army to India, had subdued Sind, he granted the local Hindus and Buddhists full religious freedom and guaranteed the protection of their shrines. Or, for that matter, when Sultan Sikander of Kashmir, egged on by his Brahmin Prime Minister, Suha Bhat, set about pulling down temples on a large scale, the leading Kashmiri Muslim Sufi , Hazrat Nuruddin Nurani, bitterly protested, arguing that Islam did not sanction this. This opinion was shared by several other Muslim 'ulama and Sufis as well. Thus, the Tabaqat-e-Akbari tells us that when they heard that Sultan Sikander Lodi (r. 1489-1517) was planning to destroy some temples, a group of high-ranking 'ulama protested, saying that, 'It is not lawful to lay waste ancient idol temples'.

Caution must be exercised in accepting the narratives provided by medieval writers about the exploits of kings, including their 'feats' of temple destruction. Most historians were employees of the royal courts, and they tended to exaggerate the 'exploits' of the kings in order to present them as great champions of Islam, an image that hardly fits the facts that we know about them.

Thus, for instance, the author of the late eighteenth century 'Riyaz-ul Salatin' claimed that Muhammad Bakhtiyar demolished several temples in Bengal when he captured the province in 1204, although there is no evidence to suggest that this had indeed be the case.

In his recent book, 'Essays on Islam and Indian History', the well-known historian Richard Eaton points out that of the sixty thousand-odd cases of temple destruction by Muslim rulers cited by contemporary Hindutva sources one may identify only eighty instances 'whose historicity appears to be reasonably certain'. Eaton clearly shows that cases of destruction of places of worship were not restricted to Muslim rulers alone. He recounts numerous instances of Hindu kings having torn down Hindu temples, in addition to Jaina and Buddhist shrines. He says that these must be seen as, above all, powerful politically symbolic acts.

Typically, cases of shrine destruction are reported in the wake of the overthrow

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of a powerful enemy and the annexation of his territory. The royal temple of the enemy was often pulled down to symbolise the enemy's defeat. Thus, for instance, the historical records speak of the seventh century Hindu Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, who looted an idol of Ganesha from the Chalukyan capital of Vatapi.

Fifty years later, the Hindu Chalukyan army brought back with them idols of Ganga and Jamuna, looted from temples of their fellow Hindu enemies to the north. In the eighth century, a Bengali Hindu army is said to have destroyed an idol of Vishnu belonging to their imperial foe, the Hindu king Lalitaditya of Kashmir. In the tenth century, the Hindu Pratihara king Herambapala defeated the Hindu Shahi king of Kangra and looted a solid gold idol of Vishnu from the Kangra royal temple. In the eleventh century, the Chola ruler Rajendra I furnished his capital with idols of Hindu deities that he had captured from his enemies, the Chalukyas, the Palas and the Kalingas.

The sixteenth century Vijaynagara ruler, Krishna Deva Raya, is reported to have looted an idol of Krishna from Udaygiri after inflicting on it a crushing defeat. He is also said to have looted a Vittala idol from the famous Pandharpur temple. Besides looting idols from the temples of their fellow Hindu enemies, several Hindu kings are reported to have destroyed the royal temples of their vanquished foes to signal their victory.

Thus, the tenth century Rashtrakuta king Indra III destroyed the temple of Kalapriya at Kalpa, after defeating his dreaded enemies, the Rashtrakutas. Likewise, Kapilendra, the founder of the Suryavanshi Gajapati dynasty in Orissa is said to have sacked several Hindu temples in the course of his military campaigns in the Tamil country.

These are instances of Hindu kings looting Hindu idols and destroying Hindu temples for political purposes. The number of Jain and Buddhist shrines destroyed by Hindu kings must certainly be much greater. Because royal temples served as powerful political symbols and centres - where often kings were worshipped as forms of the deities - they seem to have been the particular object of attack by invaders, irrespective of religion.

As Eaton remarks, 'It is clear that temples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority well before the coming of Muslim Turks to India. Not surprisingly, Turkish invaders, when attempting to plant their own rule in early medieval India, followed and continued established patterns'. He further adds that 'Whatever form they took, acts of temple desecration were never directed at the people, but at the enemy king and the image that incarnated and displayed his state-deity'. Like in the case of Hindu rulers' attacks on temples, Eaton says that almost all instances of Muslim rulers destroying Hindu shrines were recorded in the wake of their capture of enemy territory. Once these territories were fully integrated into their dominions, few temples were targeted.

This itself clearly shows that these acts were motivated, above all, by political concerns and not by a religious impulse to extirpate idolatry. The essentially political, as opposed to religious or communal, nature of these acts is clearly suggested in the details that the historical chronicles provide.

Thus, for instance, we hear of the army of the Golconda Muslim Sultans, led by the Marathi Hindu Brahmin general, Murahari Rao, which conquered a large swathe of territory up to the Krishna river. Rao is said to have sacked the famous Ahobilam temple, and looted its ruby-studded idol, which he presented to the Sultan as a war trophy. Likewise, we are told that Sultan Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal dispatched an army to Orissa against the Hindu Gajapati Raja to punish him for entering into a pact with the enemies of the Sultan, the Mughal Emperor Akbar and the Pathan Ibrahim Sur. The army, after defeating the Raja, then set about looting the Jagannath temple, the main royal shrine. As Eaton shows, it was usually the large royal temples that were targeted, for not only were they symbols of political power, but were also richly endowed with jewels, gold and other precious metals.

In the wake of these attacks on enemy power, ordinary people were rarely targeted. Thus, for instance, when a Mughal army attacked Kuch Bihar in northern Bengal and destroyed the idol of the state-deity of Raja Bhim Narayan, the chief Mughal qazi of Bengal, Sayyed Muhammad Sadiq, issued an order to the Mughal soldiers that, 'nobody should touch the cash and property of the people', laying down that those who infringed this order would have their hands, ears or noses lopped off.

If the destruction of temples were, above all, powerful political acts, so too were instances of patronage extended to temples by rulers. Thus, in addition to Hindu rulers, many Muslim kings endowed temples with large land grants. A fourteenth century Sanskrit inscription records that thirteen years after his annexation of the northern Deccan, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq appointed a Muslim official to repair a Shiva temple at Kalyana. The much-maligned Aurangzeb, who is said to have destroyed some Hindu temples, is also known to have made extensive grants to other Hindu shrines.

Thus, in 1659 in a royal order issued to his officers in Benaras, he wrote: 'In these days, information has reached our court that several people have, out of spite and rancour, harassed the Hindu residents of Benaras and nearby places, including a group of Brahmans who are in charge of ancient temples there. These people want to remove those Brahmans from their charge of temple-keeping, which has caused them considerable distress. Therefore, upon receiving this order, you must see that nobody unlawfully disturbs the Brahmans or other Hindus of that region, so that they might remain in their traditional place and pray for the continuance of the Empire' Aurangzeb further added that, 'According to the Holy law [shari'at] and the exalted creed, it has been established that ancient temples should not be torn down'.

Eaton, after closely examining the historical record, shows that the temples whose destruction Aurangzeb had ordered had been associated with his political rivals. If temples belonging to Hindu political rivals were targetted by Muslim kings, they did not desist from similarly brutally attacking their fellow Muslim foes and rebels.

The history of Muslim rule in India is replete with stories of Muslim kings fighting among themselves. Muslim rebels were treated with equal severity as their Hindu counterparts. Thus, Isami writes in his 'Futuh us Salatin' that when the Muslim general Bahauddin Gurhasp joined hands with the Hindu Raja of Kampila and rose in revolt against Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, his own first cousin, he was flayed alive, after which his skin was stuffed with straw and paraded through the streets, after which his body was filled with rice and fed to the royal elephants.

Hindus and Muslims alike, then, have been equally guilty of destroying places of worship, and, in this regard, as in any other, neither has a monopoly of virtue or vice. The destruction of the mosque in Rajasthan and building a temple in its place, like the tearing down of the Babri Masjid by Hindutva zealots or the vandalism of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban, shows how sanctified vandalism and medieval notions of the politics of revenge are still alive and thriving in our part of the world. ❐

Sivaji Ganesan, Passing into the Legends

T.N.Gopalan

Nadigar Thilagam Sivaji Ganesan has now literally passed into the legends. He died on the night of June 22 in a private hospital in Chennai, leaving the Tamil film world hopelessly impoverished.

What was amazing was the huge crowds that turned out to see him off during his last journey. The septuagenarian actor had in fact been consigned to the margins years ago. The bubbly young heroes like Vijay and Ajith dominate the show these days. The later arrivals to the film-world like Kamalahasan and Rajnikanth could still keep rake in huge collections, but their appearances have become progressively rarer.

In the circumstances the crowd turnout for Sivaji's funeral was indeed overwhelming. For one whole day the body was kept for public viewing, and the masses jostled against each other to get one last glimpse of their favourite actor.

How much of a favourite was he is really a moot point. For unlike MGR, alias Minimum Guarantee Ramachandran, Sivaji was not necessarily a sure bet with the financiers. It was always a case of hit and miss. Whatever the quality of his films, however powerful his portrayal might be, one could never be sure of their success at the box-office.

The climate of politics in Tamil Nadu had something to do with his popularity or lack of it. His emergence as a big-time actor coincided with the period during which the DMK and later the AIADMK had become dominant political forces in the State and Sivagi's failure to align with either of these parties certainly had an impact. Having remained politically unaligned, he entered the battleground of politics under the Congress-banner. But he reached a dead-end time and again before he gave up. The rise of Jayalalitha further compounded his miseries, the wild ways of her disowned foster son V.N.Sudhagaran, married to Sivaji's granddaughter, serving only to turn his last years into a very unhappy saga.

There was a definite threat of his dying unfelt, unsung and unwept. But almost the entire Tamil Nadu seemed to mourn the death of one of their greatest sons, a man who successfully rose above his limitations and establish himself as one of the all time greats of the celluloid world.

Men and women in large numbers thronged his residence in T.Nagar, the satellite TV channels kept flashing clips from his films, newspapers brought out special editions to pay their homage, for two full days at least it looked as if the famous Sivaji magic had been resurrected. And he was cremated with full state honours. It was indeed an irony he achieved in his death what perhaps he had failed to while alive - command the respect of the entire Tamil society.

The thespian had once said, "I want to die in harness, with my make-up on." It was not to be. He himself never made any secret of his pique over the unkind fate.

"Here I am, so accomplished, so versatile, willing to do anything assigned to me, to the satisfaction of the director. Still there are no takers...Even those who made millions through my films do not care to turn their attention to me...The Tamil audience seem to have completely forgotten me...How very ungrateful of them all...," he is known to have lamented to anyone who was willing to lend his or her shoulders.

He continued to make some cameo appearances to his last days, but they were nothing much to speak of. He had had his day, but he would not seem to accept the brutal realities. It looked like he was crying to be kicked around as an inconsequential agit-prop.

But why? He had made enough money, bagged enough honours, nationally and internationally...What more did he want out of life? Well, possibly he had had a very unhappy domestic life. He actually said as much in an interview: "My only solace is cinema...otherwise it has been a cup of woe, overflowing...What else can I do except look longingly at the cameras in order to escape the gloom surrounding me?"

Besides he also seemed to have enjoyed adulation, he was never tired of it till the very end. Lusty clapping inside the theatres, any kind of title conferred on him, cover stories on him, it all gave him a lot of ego-kick, he seemed to want more and more of it.

Reminiscing on one of his visits to the USA, he told an interviewer, "I felt very happy...The first impression of wonder was with the sights...I was then uncomfortable because I felt I was just another face in the crowd. Having got used to the attention of my people back home, it was a strange embarrassment to walk in crowded streets without anyone taking a second look at me..." It was this urge to be recognized and idolized that made him keep harking back to the film world, never mind the rude rebuffs in the latter days.

Such was his imposing screen presence that others who co-starred with him looked Lilliputian till about the mid-seventies. Even a solitary scene appearance by Sivaji had an electrifying impact. Even the hero would look insignificant at that time.

Subsequently, though, he became irrelevant, was roped in only to boost the image of the hero, whether it be a Kamal or Rajni, and finally it came down to such a wooden actor like Vijay too.

Never mind such cruel tricks of the Gods, Villupuram Chinnaiah Pillai Ganesan was a marvel the Tamils could be justly proud of for all time to come. The sheer range of roles he handled during his long career spanning four decades is so literally breath-taking that one can only retreat in awe, feeling oneself unequal to the task.

As a king, as a commoner, as a lunatic, as an intimidating villain, as a bumbling cop, as a cavorting young man, as an octogenerian Saivite devotee, as the fire-spitting Lord Shiva himself...you name it, he had done it all in a masterly fashion, with unparalleled panache.

For Sivaji acting was an all-consuming passion, and he wanted to keep scaling new heights all the time, unfazed by the changing taste of the Tamil audience or his own failing health.

His dedication and commitment have been commented upon endlessly by those who have had the good fortune of co-starring with him or directing him. "He would never come out of the sets once he steps in," recalls Rajesh, another talented actor

who failed to realize his full potential thanks to the vagaries of the box-office, "He would closely watch the shooting even if he did not appear in that particular scene...He would remove his make-up only in the green-room and not on the sets...He would keep asking the director whether his performance was satisfactory and say he would do it all over again, if necessary...no ego-hassle there...'I'm here to deliver what you want...am at your disposal, don't hesitate,' such was his devotion..."

Barely seven, he ran away from life in a poor hutment to stage, to bright lights and pancakes. At 24, with his debut film, Parasakthi, he swept his audience off their feet, the trenchant script penned by Kalaignar Karunanidhi, adding to the film's rather unique flavour.

It is still seen as a watershed in the history of Tamil films, marking as it did the transition from the song-laden and histrionics-free mythologicals and (a) historicals of the forties. "It was all a new thing when I started that way...One of the sound engineers once turned to my director Krishnan Panju and wondered, 'What's your boy up to, opening his mouth like a fish and never closing it...this won't be right for cinema...' But my director was much more supportive, any way fortunately I made it.." he was to recall later.

He was always proud of his theatre experience: "... actors with a solid foundation, people who learn under a guru, learn drama, music, dance, there are very few left...I'm basically a female character actor..Only those who have done such roles can be genuine all-rounders..." Unfortunately, though, he never left the theatre, perhaps the other way round too.

In a way that stunted his growth. As someone succinctly put it, "He was a world class actor who remained a regional star..." His impeccable diction, stentorian voice, emoting range, grand gestures, all seen exemplified in Veerapandiya Kattabomman, took him to the pantheon of the greats – to this day he would be remembered for this role more than any other relatively realistic portrayal like in Kappalottiya Thamizhan.

The stylization has its charms after all, but the problem was he never realized that there were many other dimensions to acting and that through understatement, through much more restrained performance, he could win international accolades which eluded him right through his career, despite his indisputable genius.

It was only in 1985 when Bharati Raja, who introduced genuine rural milieu to the Tamil film world, cast Sivaji as a loyal servant of a feudal household and as a noble husband suffering in silence, he demonstrated that he did not have to indulge in hysterics in order to carry conviction with the audience. Alas, an experiment that came too late in his career. Still Mudhal Mariyadhai would remain an eloquent testimony to his unrealized potentials.

There was a galaxy of very talented actors who shared the limelight along with him, V.K.Ramasamy, V.S.Raghavan, S.V. Subbiah, Balaiah, Nagaiah, S.V.Sahasranamam, Nagesh, and actresses like Savithri, Bhanumathi and Sarojadevi, Padmini, not to mention the inimitable Manorama. Some of them are no more, and others over the hill. Barring Kamal Hasan there is no one else around who could be placed in the Hall of Fame.

With due apologies to Shakespeare, How many ages hence/Shall this our lofty thespian be imitated in vain... ❐

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu sister *seeks professional bride for brother, 33, medical doctor in UK. Send horoscope, details. M 1255 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek professional bride for son, 30, 5'3", British citizen, post graduate qualifications in Investment Management and working for American Investment Bank. Send horoscope, details. M 1256 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent weddings.

Muralitharan, *son of Prof. & Mrs Balasundarampillai of 117/7 Ambalavarnar Road, Athiady, Jaffna and* **Chamila,** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gunabalasingham of 29 Gamer Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4HE on 24th June 2001 at Heathcote High School Hall, Chingford, London E4 6ES.*

Stephen, *son of Mr. & Mrs. Fear of 25 Carnoustie, Norwick, Norfolk NR4 6AY and* **Vijitha,** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kandiah of 48 Connaught Road, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 3PQ on 7th July 2001 at Addington Palace, Gravel Hill, Croydon.*

Ganarajan, *son of Mr. & Mrs. Paskaradevan of 18 Inner Fairline Road, Dehiwela, Sri Lanka and* **Shiyamala,** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kathiravelu of 11/9 Galpotta Street, Colombo 13, Sri Lanka on 23rd August 2001 at Sri Varatharaj Vinayagar Kovil, Kotahena, Sri Lanka.*

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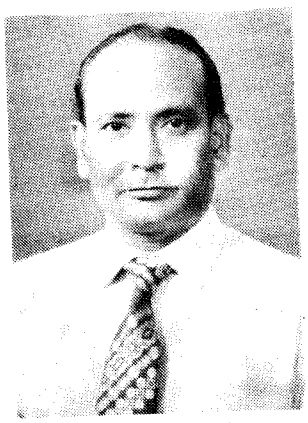
OBITUARIES



Mr. Ramanathan Nagesan *(retired planter, Hayes Group, Deniyaya, Sri Lanka) passed away on 15th June 2001 and was cremated on 21 June at the Golders Green Crematorium.*

Mrs Thirumalar (Leela) Nagesan and children Subo, Rukshi, Ram and members of the family thank all those who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and also assisted them in various ways, both during his illness and later with the funeral arrangements. They regret their inability to thank them individually - 174 Elmstead Avenue, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 8NZ, UK.

Mr. M. 'Palm Grove' Theagarajah *(b. 21.02.1909), son of late Mr. and Mrs. S. Muttutamby of Mannar Veedu, Vannarparmai, Jaffna; husband of late Annaledchumy ('Baby'); brother of late Mrs. T. Somasundharam, late Mrs. S. Rajadurai, late Mrs. R.K. Sundharam, Mrs. M. Emmanuel (Kuala Lumpur), Mrs. S. Balasingam (Sydney) and Mrs. Y. Mahesa (Toronto) passed away peacefully on July 03 2001 in London, where he was cremated on 09 July.*

He is survived by sons: Kumaranayagam ('Jeyam') and Biswanath ('Rajah'); grandchildren: Prathusha, Gowri, Prasanti and Gurunath and great-grandchildren: Kabilan, Annamika and Saranya all in the US and Canada.

The family wish to thank relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent wreaths and messages of sympathy, and comforted and assisted in their bereavement. - T Kumaranayagam, 1102, West 29th Street, Apartment #2, Los Angeles, Ca. 90007, USA. Tel: (213) 747 7073.

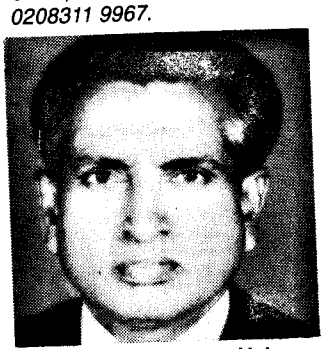
IN MEMORIAM

In loving memory of **Mrs Rajeswary Sambanthan,** *Retired teacher, on the second anniversary of her passing away on 30th August 1999.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her husband Mr. S. Sambanthan, children Chandragupthan, Pragashine, Raveendran (Ragu), Thevarajan and Shankaran; daughters-in-law Rita, Kamala, Suganthini and Sureka (Shanthi); son-in-law Varathan; grandchildren Priyanka, Vigirathan, Aarabi, Brinavan, Gowthaman, Sharanka, Sharuka, Vithuran and Methulla. - Mr. S. Shankaran, 101-20 Morrow Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R2M 1A1. Tel: 204 257 1361.

In ever loving memory of **Mrs Ruby Amirtharanee Ratnasingham,** *Retired teacher, on the first Anniversary of her passing away on 21st August 2000.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving son Kumaran, sister Thevaranee and all loved ones. - 64 Jessup Close, London SE18 7HB. Tel: 0208311 9967.



Mr. Mayilvaganam Velummayilum *J.P., U.M., Attorney-at-law and former Chairman, Urban Council, Point Pedro, Sri Lanka passed away on 31.1.89 and the twelfth anniversary of his demise falls on 31.8.2001.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife; children Thayanandarajah (UK), Nithianandarajah (New Zealand), Mayilvaganarajah (UK), Chitra (Colombo), Anandarajah, Krishnarajah and Jayanthi (all of Madras); grandsons Cameron, Ewan and Atharsan; son-in-law Kamaleswaran (Colombo); daughters-in-law Sumitra (UK), Devi (New Zealand), relatives, friends and a host of grateful constituents. - 'Hillcroft', 14 Howards Wood Drive, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL9 7HN.

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IN MEMORIAM ctd

In ever-loving memory of **Mrs. Sinnamah Velautham** *of 'Annai Illam', Urumpirai East, Sri Lanka on the first anniversary of her passing away on 14.08.2000.*

Remembered with love and affection by her children, daughter-in-law, sons-in-law and grandchilden. – 28 Princes Avenue, Roath, Cardiff CF24 3SN.

Eleventh Death Anniversary

In loving memory of **Mr. Apputhurai Gunaratnam,** *formerly Divisional Superintendent of Post Offices, Sri Lanka; of Point Pedro on the eleventh anniversary of his passing away on 28th August 1990.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife Rani, children Thirukumar (Australia), Vasuki (Sri Lanka), Devaki (Australia), Sutharsan (UK), Saratha Devi (Australia); sons-in-law Ravindran, Radhakrishnan and Sashikanth; daughter-in-law Vasanthi; grandchildren Ashvini, Yathurshini, Prushoth, Mayurikka and Mayuran. – 67B St. Ann's Road, London N15 6NJ. Tel: 020 8802 5601.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sep 1 *South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop In. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Sep 2 *Full Moon.*

Sep 3 *Feast of St. Gregory the Great.*

Sep 6 *Sankadahara Sathurthi.*

Sep 8 *Karthigai; Feast of the Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary; SLTWG Welfare Trip to Brighton. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Sep 9 *Krishna Jayanthi.*

Sep 13 *Krishna Eekathasi.*

Sep 14 *Feast of the Triumph of the Cross.*

Sep 15 *Pirathosam; Feast of the Lady of Sorrows.*

Sep 16 *Amavasai; Feast of St. Cornelius.*

Sep 17 *Feast of St. Robert Bellamine.*

Sep 19 *Feast of St. Januarius.*

Sep 20 *Sathurthi.*

Sep 21 *Feast of St. Mathew.*

Sep 22 *Shashti; Puraddaathi first Saturday.*

Sep 23 *6pm Tamil Orphans Trust presents a Carnatic Violin Concert by Bhayiravi Ganeswaran and Bharathanatyam by Sivakami Sivakumar at Beck Theatre, Hayes, Middx. For tickets call 020 8908 1101/8482 7745/8949 3012.*

Sep 28 *Sukkla Eekathasi; Feast of St. Wenceslaus.*

Sep 29 *Sani Pirathosam; Puraddaathi second Saturday.*

Sep 30 *Feast of St. Jerome.*

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Fifth Death Anniversary

In ever loving memory of **Mr. Selvarajah Kiritharan**, *Engineer, London on the fifth anniversary of his passing away on 22nd August 1996, that falls on 22nd August 2001.*

'Five years have since gone, but you will be remembered'.

Affectionately remembered by his loving parents Mr. Naganathan Selvarajah and Mrs. Kamalakumari Selvarajah of Wembley, UK; loving brother Muraleedaran and sister-in-law Dr. (Mrs) Sukaniya (Australia); loving sisters and brothers-in-law Dr. (Mrs) Subathini Ramesh and Mr. K. Ramesh, University of Jaffna; Mrs Shantini Shanmuganathan and Mr. Sundramoorthy Shanmuganathan of Greenford, UK; loving sister Miss. Shamini, Law Faculty, University of Colombo, uncles, aunties, nephews, nieces, other relatives and friends. - 28 Bridgewater Road, Alperton, Wembley Middx., HAO 1AJ. Tel: 020 8422 4627/ 020 8922 3681.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

The Tamil Senior Citizens' Association of Sydney *celebrated its tenth anniversary on July 28th 2001. The day's proceedings commenced at 10.30 a.m. with a meeting at which the Hon. John Murphy, Federal M.P. and the Deputy Mayor of Stratfield Council Mr. Abi Saab were the Chief Guests.*

The President of the Association, Mr. Samy Pasupathy welcomed the distinguished guests and members. He recounted the past activities of the Association and congratulated the founder members on their courage and foresight in setting up the organisation in 1991. He also thanked Mr. John Murphy and Mrs Murphy for gracing the occasion in spite of their tight schedule. He pointed out that Mr. John Murphy has been a friend of the Tamil Community and helped numerous Tamil constituents with their problems.

Mr. John Murphy in his speech congratulated the Association on their various activities and achievements. He stressed that the Tamil community had made an enormous contribution to the multicultural ethos of the area. He also said that he had campaigned for the rights of Sri Lankan Tamils in the land of their birth through his speeches in the Federal Parliament of Australia.

The founder members of the Association were honoured with certificates distributed by Mrs Murphy. An impressive birthday cake was cut by the first President, Mr. P.S. Segaram and the first Secretary Mr. S. Senathiraja. This was followed by several musical performances and the reading of his own poetry by a senior citizen, Mr. T. Kanagarajah. The proceedings ended after a sumptuous lunch and further entertainment. The Senior Citizens and their guests went home with the satisfaction that what was a small organisation in 1991 had grown rapidly and passed an important milestone.

Rev Sr. Josephine Tynan – An Appreciation

"When I go hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable." – Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali.

On a sunny Saturday morning in June 1970, I rushed to the Jaffna railway station from Duraiyappa's Lane at Eachchamottai Road to say Good-bye to our very special school principal whom we called 'Mother Josephine'.

Mother Josephine was fifty years old, vibrant and active, committed to her vocation and most of all to her children, we the girls of Holy Family Convent Jaffna. She had no choice but to leave the Country. She had to leave behind her childen and the beloved institution, the Holy Family Convent that she had been part of for almost three decades. Our government had decided that she had overstayed her welcome.

Nineteen seventy was the year of 'Swabasha', English language ceased to be the medium of instruction. The music we heard, the songs we sang, the dances we danced came to an abrupt end. The curtains were permanently drawn on the Shakespeare's plays we fondly acted. This is how I remember the departure of our Mother Josephine.

At the station, Mother Josephine stood in the midst of teachers and students. I heard the whistle of the Yarl Devi, approaching the platform. As always, I was running late. I ran as fast as I could. The majestic train I had often marvelled, approached the platform, but this time it appeared like a monster. It had come to take away our gentle nun.

For years she had tried to coach me to be punctual. Countless number of times she had told me 'Agnes, living far from school is not an excuse for you to come late to school. You are not at all taking any effort to get up early from bed.' Here I am, late again, to bid good-bye to my principal during her very last moment on Jaffna soil. I ran into her arms. 'Write to me Agnes' she said.

I began writing to Mother Josephine. I wrote about her children, the convent, and then I continued to write about the spiral of violence that gripped the Jaffna peninsula. She wrote back from Leeds, England and later from Northern Ireland. During the past thirty-one years, I have moved to twelve towns in three countries, but we never stopped corresponding. Three generations of us, girls from the Jaffna town, are indebted to this woman's life-long service. She shaped and moulded our values. For what ever we have become today, she had something to do with it. The institution of the Holy Family she left behind in Jaffna will be there for ever. It is a symbol of hope in that war ravaged town. In May 1999 Mother Josephine wrote the following article on the beginnings of H.F.C. Jaffna to the Old Girls' Association of Holy family Convent Jaffna.

"Our founder, Fr. P.B. Noailles, wished to collaborate with the oblates of Mary Immaculate, who had established mission stations in the Far East. In September 1862 a little band of six French sisters sailed from Marseilles to Sri Lanka – the very first nuns to set foot on the island. They reached Jaffna on All Souls Day and received a tremendous welcome from the people. A lay woman, Mrs. Flanafan, who was Irish (whose husband was in the British Army), had been conducting a 'Female Seminary' for the education of Tamil girls. The newly arrived missionaries took over this establishment. They lived in an unpretentious house near the Rest House in Main Street. They also took charge of an orphanage for girls. Two years later in 1864 Bishop J.S. Semeria blessed the corner stone of the present Holy Family Convent, Jaffna. It took seven years to finish but the spacious imposing building was solemnly opened by Bishop Bonjean on Nov. 9th 1869. The sisters started a school to give English Education to children of the upper class as well as catering for vernacular education, and engaging in various charitable works in the area.

Parents from all over the island soon began sending their girls to H.F.C. to be educated and to avail of the Boarding accommodations provided. Infant and Primary schools – taking boys up to ten years old, as well as the collegiate section grew and grew over the century. New buildings to cater for the Science and Crafts Departments – so that Jaffna girls would get an all round education and reach the required Academic standards.

Girls were prepared for the public examinations and had a choice of subjects. In the early years exams like the Junior and Senior Cambridge – London matriculations and Inter Arts & Science exams for admission to Universities and Training Colleges were on offer. There was also a flourishing Music Department and Commercial classes. There were always a well qualified teaching staff loyal and dedicated and pupils well behaved, easy to teach and anxious to learn. Parents and people were most supportive. Hindus and Muslims were also admitted and by the 1970s numbers were up to a thousand. It was the Lord's work."

"Unless the lord builds the house in vain, do the builders toil" – Psalm 27.

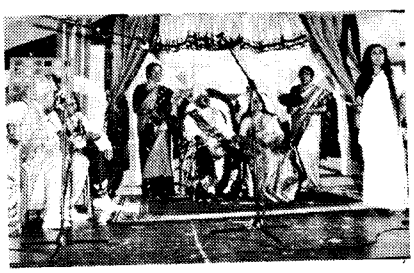
In May 2001, Sr. Josephine was diagnosed with Cancer. Pain and anguish was masked by vitality and life. She quoted Rabindranath Tagore: 'Let your life gently dance on the edges of time – like dew on the top of a leaf'.

Sr. Josephine Tynan pased away on July 30th in Northern Ireland. She was eighty-one. An upright former Jaffna School Principal, a disciplinarian and a symbol of honesty, will continue to live in the hearts of many.

Agnes Pathmini Francis
Thambynayagam,

August 2001.

Senior Citizens Stage 'Kannagi'



I had the rare opportunity of witnessing the age old Tamil story 'Kannagi' in Sillapathikaram staged by the Senior Citizens of the Tamil Centre, Wembley on 22nd July 2001 at the Wembley High School Hall. It is noteworthy that the entire cast consisted of Senior Citizens belonging to the centre.

Without elaborating on all aspects of the well produced drama, I wish to express my profound appreciation of the performance of Mrs. Rajamani Sivaloganathan who acted the part of 'Kannagi' admirably and appears on the extreme right of the above picture. The audience was spellbound, enthralled and emotionally taken up by her brilliant acting bringing back Kannagi to life that day. The audience would have been glued to their seats by her eloquent rendering of the section where she challenges the King and Queen to prove that her husband had robbed an anklet belonging to the Queen. She not only proved the honesty of her husband, but also her honesty and chastity and seemed to have a spiritual quality.

Congratulations should be extended to all the Seniors for their excellent perfor-

continued on page 33

continued from page 32

mance. More such dramas should be staged for the benefit of our younger generation, who are ignorant of our ancient stories like Sillapathikaram.

C. Kannuthurai.

President, Sri Lanka Railway Past Employees Welfare Assoc. UK

First Carnatic Vocal Arangetram in Canada

Sri Lankan Tamils displaced from their homeland and living in the western countries have been practicing their indigenous cultural and religious activities in those countries. In a multi-cultural society of Canada too they are keen to educate their children in the fine arts of Carnatic music and Bharatha Naatyam. Quite a number of fine arts teachers in Canada, particularly in Toronto, have established their own schools of music and dancing and a number of our youngsters have already progressed in these arts to the level of performing in Arangetrams. Every year about six students appear for the different grades of examination in Carnatic music conducted by the Tamil Isai Kalaa Manram. Leading musicians from India are arranged to perform in Bharathi Kalaa Manram for the past twenty-five years. All these activities have raised the level of musical literacy among the Tamil population.

Arangetrams have already been held in the fields of Bharatha Naatyam and Mridhangam. But the first Arangetram in Carnatic vocal music by two sisters, namely Tharmathai and Bhamini, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramanan of Toronto, was held on July 22nd at the Markham Theatre of Performing Arts. They had their training for more than 7 years under Mrs. Kulanayaki Vivekananthan, a prominent vocal teacher and performer in Toronto. The duet singers, Tharmathai and Bhamini, deserve our congratulations for having reached a high level of performance in a short period, in spite of their upbringing in a totally alien cultural environment. Their parents and guru deserve due credit for their encouragement and perseverance given to the two sisters.

The chief guest for this Arangetram was Smt. Bhushany Kalyanaraman, a most prominent Sri Lankan vocalist, who was recently awarded the Kalai Maamani title in South India. Being the wife of an eminent vocalist late Thanjavur S. Kalyanaraman, she is now settled down in Chennai. The accompaniments for the recital were provided by Smt. Kalpana Venkat on the violin, Sri Gowrishankar Balachandran on the Mridhangam, Sri Ravi Balasubramanian on the ghatam and Sri Gajajeyan Pararasasegaram on the morsing. Kalpana is a popular violinist from India, now settled down in the U.S.A. She is the prime disciple of Kalaimamani Smt. T. Rukmani. She has accompanied many leading artists like Nithyasree Mahadevan, Sri Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna and many more. Gowrishankar is the most popular mridhangist among Canadian and American musicians. He had his training under a well-known guru Sri Bakthavatsalam in India. He has accompanied on the mridhangam for world famous vocalists like K.J. Jesudas and Seshagopalan. On the ghatam was Ravi who is a well-accomplished artist on the ghatam is now stationed in the U.S.A. He is the disciple of Sri V. Suresh in Chennai. Gajajeyan is a rising artist and is a disciple of Gowrishankar. He has also accompanied many artists.

The program for the Arangetram that went on for about three hours consisted of a variety of kritis in different raagas. It started with a varnam in Naatakurinji and ended with a Thillana in Hindolum. The highlights of the program were a Pancharatna kriti of Saint Thiyagaraja in Sri ragam, a Ragam-Thanam-Pallavi in Shanmugapriya followed by kalpana swaras in ragamalika. The main item was a Dikshithar kriti in Kamboji raagam and misra chaapu thaalam, for which Gowrishankar and Ravi played 'thani aavathanam' on percussion instruments. Tharmathai and Bhamini have to be commended for having successfully attempted to sing pallavi in Kanda Triputa thaalam and the raga malika swarams. Any flaws particularly in rendering aalapana and kalpana swarams were compensated by the meticulous handling on the violin by Kalpana Venkat. The audience of over five hundred were highly satisfied by the overall performance. However, it should be noted that improvisation in raga-aalaapanai and swaram singing is an art which has to be cultivated by intense practice and experience. The sisters have a long way to go in becoming experts in this.

The chief guest Mrs. Bhushany Kalyanaraman and the guest-speakers Sangeetha Bhooshanam Rajalingam, Mr. Sreepathy on behalf of Tamil Isai Kalaa Manram and Mr. Venkataraman on behalf of Bharathi Kalaa Manram spoke and congratulated Tharmathai and Bhamini sisters. On this occasion a CD by the two sisters of Toronto named 'Ganamutham' was released. A better performance particularly in the songs in raagams like PoorviKalyani, Abheri and Mathyamavathi were pleasing to listen to. A notable feature of the CD is that the mridhangam accompaniment in it was given by Janahan Ramanan, an eleven year young budding artist now under tutelage with Gowrishankar. Let us give our best wishes to the Toronto sisters and their younger brother Janahan for a bright future in their endeavor in our fine arts.

Prof. S. Muthulingam.

Dharsharn's Vocal Arangetram

The vocal Arangetram of 13 years old Dharshana, disciple of Gana Bhushanam Smt Ambika Thamotheram and student of West London Tamil School took place at Beck Theatre, Hayes, UK on 4th August 2001. She is daughter of Navendran and Kalachelvi from Edgware,Middlesex and grand daughter of Late Mr. E. Sabalingam, Emeritus Principle, Jaffna Hindu College.

The special Guest of the Arangetram was Sangeetha Kalanithi Dr. N. Ramani, from Chennai And a Musician Legend. Dr. Ramani praised young Dharshana and her illustrious Guru. The Ragam Thanam Pallavi in Shanumugapriya ragam needs special mention. She was ably supported by Sri Balachander – Mridangam, Sri Sivaganesh – Violin, Sri Prakash – Gadam, Sri Sithamparanathan – Morsing and Selvi Bairavi Ganeshwaran –Thambura.

The compering by Dr. Kanchana Sivalingam in English and Tamil enlivened the evening's programme.

Deepa.

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